

THE FUR MERCHANTS

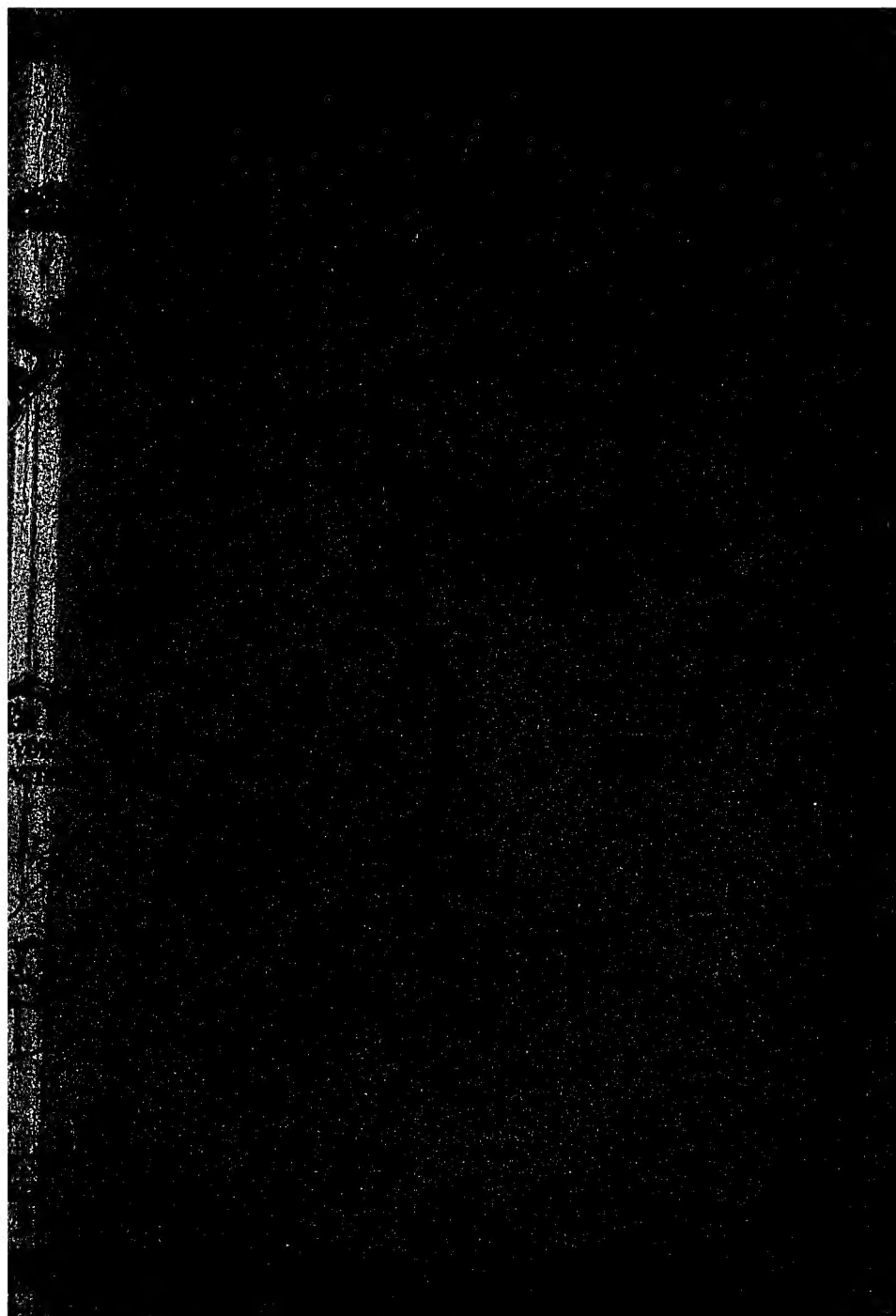
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THE FUR MASTERS

By ALAN SULLIVAN

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THE FUR MASTERS

ALAN SULLIVAN

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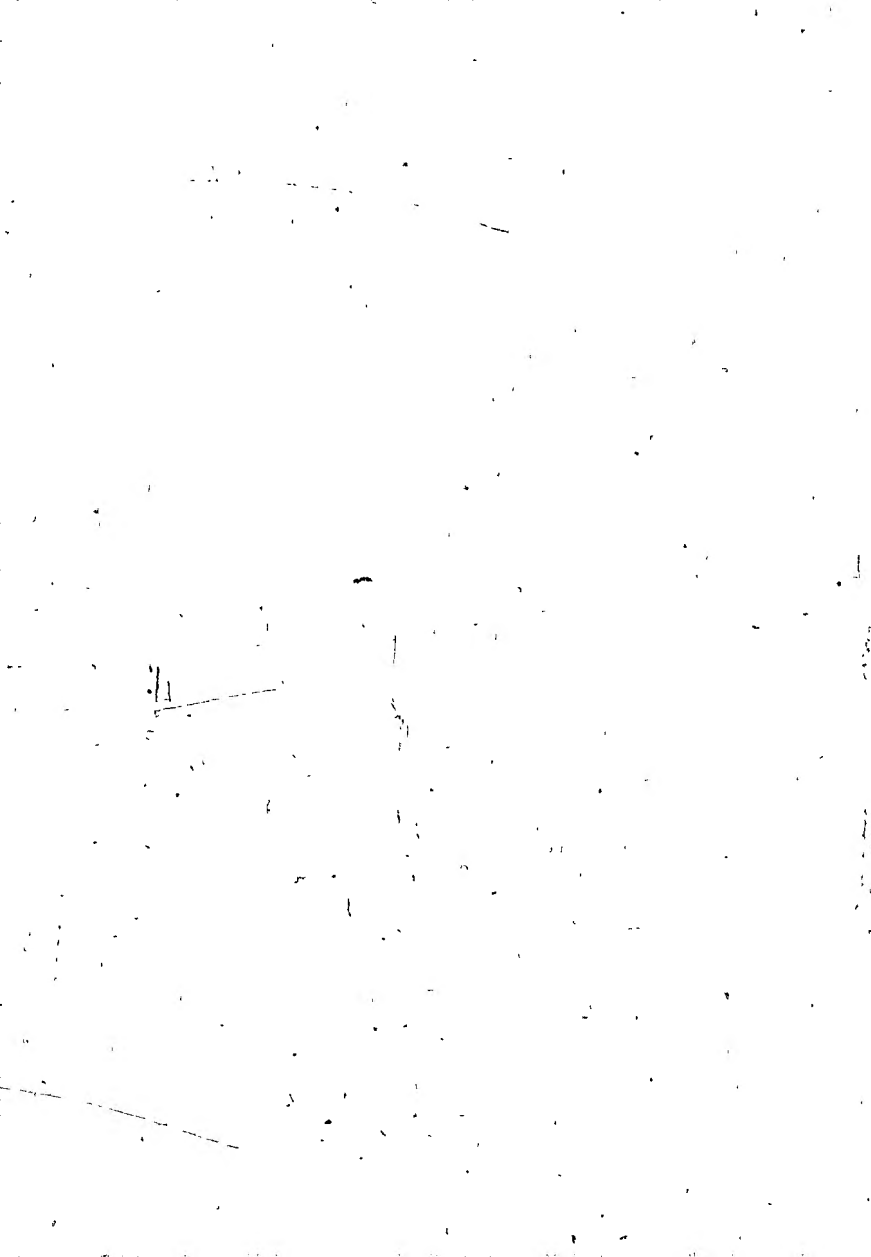
SULLIVAN, A.

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CHAPTER I

ON HUDSON'S BAY

ON a summer day in the year 1804, Big Angus, a middle-aged Scot, stood in the guerite, or watch-tower of York Factory, chief establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company, staring out over the wrinkled expanse of sea : he had broad sloping shoulders, sandy hair and beard, and steel-grey eyes. His wide mouth was firmly set, his expression one of dour resolution. Beside him, and mounted on a squat wooden truck, was a small bull-mouthed cannon, ready primed, loaded with a blank charge.

From this position he could see over the empty flats where the Nelson and Hayes Rivers met at salt water, and on the peninsula between their mouths had been built the fort, many of its buildings set up on stilts to escape the floods that often invaded this desolate region. There was but little timber, and no protection from the wind save the stout palisade ; in summer the place was cursed with mosquitoes, in winter assailed by every gale that swept these lonely shores.

Only once in the twelve-month did anything of real moment happen, and that was when the yearly ship arrived from England to bring trade goods and carry back fur, and now for the first sight of the *King George* from Gravesend, by way of Hudson's Strait, Big Angus

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searched the flat horizon, as he had for days, through an extended telescope. She would touch first at Fort Prince of Wales with its massive stone bastions on the Churchill farther north, another but less frequented gateway to the west, then come south to York Factory to disgorge the season's outfit of supplies, taking in exchange the precious packs for sorting and sale in London.

While Angus waited and watched there came from the central hall in the fort square a droning voice as the chaplain, the Rev. Colin Macphail, conducted a lengthy service for a mixed congregation in which the principal figure was Mr. John Macnab, Chief Factor. Beside him sat John Calder, the surgeon, and behind these two on wooden benches were the clerks and tradesmen such as tailors, smiths and carpenters; behind these the homeguard of *engagés*, stockily built Knistenaux Crees with impassive faces and dark uncommunicative eyes, and lastly a mixed assembly of breeds and Indians of both sexes. The air was redolent with the odour of fish, fur, and strong wild bodies.

From his platform the Rev. Macphail regarded his flock with understanding gaze. He approved the infrangible rule of the company that all employees, great and small, must sit at his feet at least once a week. This was his day as well as the Lord's, and he made the most of it.

For months past he had been expounding the lives of Biblical characters, dealing now with Japhet, though quite aware that interest in that personage was confined to himself, and to-day he could not miss the general air of ill-controlled excitement that possessed his hearers from Macnab down. Their thoughts were

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with the *King George*, and surely she could not be far off. Macnab kept fingering his chin and looking at Calder : Calder pushed out his lips and gave a shrug. Neither of them really saw the preacher ; they were with Big Angus, staring, staring at the hard horizon, sniffing the cold salt breeze. Would the cursed ship never come ?

"Japhet, my friends," rolled the austere voice, "had two brothers, Shem and Ham : they were fine lads, all of them, and, it is believed, clever artificers wi' tools an' the like : so when their father, Noah, warned from on high that there would be a great spate in his part of the worrld, bid them set aboot fashioning the ark, though there wasn'a yet a cloud in the sky, they didn'a complain, just as we, my brethren, mustn'a complain, but——"

Bang !

It burst through the small, wide-open windows with electrical effect : it seemed to lift the very benches : a quiver ran along those burdened seats : Macnab of a sudden tossed up his chin with a deep, audible grunt : Calder gave a jerky nod, grinning at his chief ; there came a low deep murmur from the crowded homeguard. The room was tense. But Macphail, for whom that signal meant as much as for any, gave no sign at all : he was a minister in the middle of his discourse, and in that moment rose to the peak of ministerial authority. His back stiffened, his jaw muscles stood out, he made a commanding gesture, his eye had a masterful sweep. His discourse was not finished, let twenty *King Georges* loom over the rim of the sea.

"You will picture to yourselves that wonderful scene when before the black clouds gathered and the rains

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began, Noah put the great news to those fine lads of his, and——”

It was a triumph. Not once did the strong tones falter or the thread slacken, so on and on while Macnab, divided between iron discipline and his own mounting impatience, gnawed his lip at the sound of Calder's choked guffaws, and the fort *engagés* neared their limit.

Bang !

Big Angus had reloaded, and fired again. No doubt about the *King George* now. Came a stealthy shuffle of feet from the rear. The shape of the congregation changed. It was in flux. One hunter crawled out on hands and knees as though he were stalking a moose. Another followed—then more. They had slipped Macphail's leash. They would hear of this later, but what matter. To hell with Japhet ! A squaw got up and through a window handed out a papoose to its emancipated father. Signs of dissolution increased. Now Macnab caught the preacher's eye, an eye that had evaded him since the first report, and made a gesture. At this, Macphail surrendered, but with honour, dismissing Japhet and his flock all in a breath. There was a rush and thudding of moccasined feet. The hall belched its panting contents, while Calder and Macnab hastened to the guerite.

There she was, resting like a gull on the steel-grey line of sea : her belly would be stuffed with supplies and trade goods and packets of letters, complete twelve months' issues of the *Edinburgh Scotsman*, and all that these lonely folk dared hope for in such case as theirs, and it would be hours before she worked into anchorage two miles out, for the wind was light, but

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already the boats were being shoved off, and excitement grew along those desolate shores.

Next night Captain Turner and his officers were entertained at the factor's table while the exiles hung on news of the outer world ; of the man, Napoleon ; how Admiral Nelson with the Mediterranean fleet had set out to blockade Toulon. Queer, thought Macnab, what a lot was going on elsewhere, and how little it seemed to matter here ; but what did matter was a letter he had received from the Board. It burned in his pocket now. He didn't like it. Weeks later, he gave it to Calder.

"What do you make of that—the same old story over again."

The letter expressed dissatisfaction with the return made by the largest post in the company's domain. It pointed out that for years past the shipment of fur had been diminishing ; this year it reached the lowest yet ; the price of trade goods was up ; home difficulties grew with the Napoleonic wars ; competition by the Canadians from Montreal was sharper than ever. What did Macnab propose to do about it ?

Calder, a dry man of pawky humour, stretched his legs to the fire. "Why worry about yon ? Dinna fash yourself without reason. Have another dram."

"It's not so easily settled."

"I'm thinking that were the Governor and Committee to spend a year in these regions the company might be the better for it."

"Which is too much to hope for in our time. Calder, if the truth is told, those Canadians are more at home in this country than ourselves. In the strong woods they defeat us by sharper trading and freer use

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of liquor, and God knows we have not spared that. The interior swims in our high wine. I've done all I could."

He spoke with deep feeling, born of years of faithful isolation. In summer time, when nights were short and brigades arrived from the west, life was not so bad: then when the same brigades were despatched to inland posts, there followed a liveable season and the penultimate warmth of Indian summer, while the air filled with flights of birds migrating south, swans, geese and ducks, innumerable flocks whose plump bodies were dried or stored in casks of brine for later consumption. Next the approach of bitter weather, with wind moaning through naked poplars, willows and alder fringing the flat shore. Then winter gripping the land tight, with the Great Bay frozen for miles out. For those long dark months the post was a bleak spot in which to be marooned with no warm green spruce or hemlock to temper the frigid gales, and Macnab, who limped from an old gunshot wound, found the snowshoe trails too trying for his strength.

"Calder," said he despondently, "lend me your wits."

"The wits of a surgeon to the fur trade! My job is to patch up your guides and hunters."

"I'd welcome your independent judgment. Look here."

He unrolled a great sheet of parchment, weighting its corners. This map, a bold affair, drawn in India ink, charted lakes, rivers and portages, and the localities of savage tribes from the Bay to the Mackenzie, from the Ottawa to the Coppermine, with drawings of beasts, birds and Indians, notations in fine script made from the reports of explorations, symbols indicating

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the posts of the company and its rivals. Many of the rivers began with dotted lines showing that their source remained undiscovered, lakes and islands had boundaries partly unplotted, but what lay there recorded was accurate enough for the restless adventurers who passed that way. Men had died in the making of this map and the two officers regarded it with a sort of reverence; for them it was a potent thing with mysterious invitation to the unknown.

Macnab's finger followed the long route up the Nelson and across to Athabasca waters.

"We have been asleep, Calder, asleep while the enemy gathered the spoils. In Montreal they smile at us, in the strong woods they take the law into their own hands till there is now no law in the interior. Our posts have been robbed and burned, our men waylaid. It is thirty years ago that Samuel Hearne surrendered Fort Prince of Wales, and Humphrey Masters presented this York Factory to La Perouse, the French admiral, when he should have been beaten off. 'Twas a poor example we then set and have since followed."

"I disagree there," said the surgeon promptly, "thanks to the niggardly methods of our most honourable company there were but forty men in Fort Prince of Wales when it should have been a hundred."

"Ay, but with ten feet of solid masonry, with forty mounted guns and ample ammunition. I tell you that——" He broke off with a laugh. "Tut tut! we're away up the old trail again and to no purpose, but that disgrace still sticks in my crop and we have shown but little spirit since. We grew soft, Calder, soft, because the savages were content to bring their

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furs to salt water at our convenience, while now it is for us to seek their favour beside the Canadians and the XY. We are handicapped by our methods of business, and the company's stock stands at far lower than its former value. That agitates the gentlemen in London and turns my own stomach."

"You're needing something to settle that stomach," said the surgeon dryly. "What do the London gentlemen care for you or me? Drink, man, drink."

"I have thought of something. Who would you say we might best send to the interior?"

"Are there not enough new stations already, and running at a loss?"

"We must lose more before we begin to gain."

Calder, looking dubious, laid a finger on Lake Athabasca. "Macnab, listen to me. Two years ago you argued that we must repay the Canadians in their own coin and invade their territory, so you sent Peter Fidler up the Churchill, over Methye Portage and into Arctic waters where he built Nottingham House. Also you sent Swain to the Great Slave, and what came of it all—just seven packs."

"True enough, but I am thinking that Fidler was too much of a gentleman to handle the Canadians; also there was sickness amongst the beaver, but that's not what's in my mind. I am for information, Calder, first-hand information to send to London next summer: I'm for despatching the right man with his party well armed, well supplied with enough liquor and goods for trading. By God! I'd send him all the way to New Caledonia. He would see what the Canadians are doing and where, so often as possible he would put a flea in their shirts and return with the Athabasca

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canoes next July. But such a man must be strong and fearless, a Crusader if you will. Have we such a one? I have the authority to use him."

"It sounds like a bit of a foray to harass the Sassenachs," said Calder lifting his brows.

"Call it what you will, 'twould warm my heart if we struck back now and again, but against that," he added bitterly, "I am officially advised that the company is all for peace."

Calder fell thoughtful, filling his glass, then: "There's one man occurs to me is silent enough for such work, that's Big Angus, but he might lose what's left of his powers of speech before he got back."

"I was thinking of him myself. A man of strange disposition. He will never rise to be factor and does not seem to care: he has been well into the interior."

"Has he a family? It would be a hazardous expedition."

"If so he does not mention it, nor send one single letter, while his wages lie to his credit unspent. It seems he has done with Scotland with no desire to return."

"Done with Scotland!" repeated the surgeon, "when I would give my boots to be there again. Well, why not have him in?"

Big Angus was shooting wild geese on the salt flats at the mouth of the Hayes River: he loved shooting, but always alone, and when flint came down on steel he invariably killed. Being of a speechless nature, he had made no friends in York Factory, but gave voiceless obedience to Macnab. He was seemingly without ambition, but entirely trustworthy: he had great physical fortitude, and no fear lay in him. A hard man—hard and lonely.

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Nor was he singular in this withdrawal, and many such another now dwelt in the *pays d'en haut*, those on whom the wilderness put strong detaining hands, attracting them to herself, smoothing from their minds the things of yesterday, till one day slid imperceptibly into the next, beckoning from her secret places, till after a while her mute adoption was perfected, and those she had embraced asked for nothing more.

So it was with Angus when, burdened with warm, heavy bodies, he tramped back to the factory, left his geese to be plucked and pickled, cleaned his gun, changed his footwear, and, standing at attention, waited till Macnab at slow length explained his purpose.

He listened and nodded, knowing the range of his chief's district and what it was yielding in fur. From the mouth of the Nelson to Lake Athabasca his authority was supreme over posts that ran towards the slopes of the Rockies with the flag of the company flaunting above their stockades.

They had been established in the face of fierce opposition from the Canadians: fire, assault, murder by incited savages and all the shrewd trickery of experienced traders had not subdued them. Five thousand miles from where the Governor sat in comfort in London, issuing orders that were oft impossible of fulfilment, the factors of these posts were cast on their own resources, and small thanks came to them across the seas. Yet they were completely loyal though standing the brunt of failure with but small share in success: banished from their own flesh and blood, they drew but scanty pittance at the end of service. On such men lay the weight of the war for the fur, and

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it cost dear that in their ranks were so few of the native-born French traders and trappers whose restless energy ran through every effort of the Canadians.

"Angus," continued Macnab earnestly, "we have our legal position in this matter, with charter rights over all land watered by streams running into the Hudson's Bay, and this, as you know, has been confirmed by the highest courts against every attack. But to maintain those rights to the exclusion of all other traders would require an army. We have no army and the company is bent on avoiding further friction, though the friction is not of our making, so now it is for us to outwit the Canadians if we can and recapture something at any rate of what is legitimately ours. That is what lies in my mind—what is in yours?"

"Not much, sir, but the Canadians are stronger in their posts than ourselves, and a few of us are expected to do the duty of many. That is why the Gros Ventres have massacred our people, not daring to touch the Canadians."

"Fort Prince of Wales over again," said Calder, "the same old story."

"Which, though true, is not helpful at the moment," retorted the factor. "Angus, I give you a mission of responsibility, and its object will be kept to ourselves. You will start with the first hard frost, and meantime think this matter over."

"I have done some thinking already." The voice was curt.

"Well?"

"Our poor trade does not all lie at the door of the Canadians," he grunted with dry contempt, "an' it made me fair sick to see some of the stuff unloaded

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when I was in the interior. That's why the savages drank our liquor, then traded elsewhere. The flints were not reliable, too like to splinter, an' you know what that means : the Brazil tobacco was mouldy an' rotten wi' wormholes in the roundlets, an' they English kettles too heavy. Ay, 'twas poor goods, an' we're paying the price now."

"All past history," countered the factor ruffled, "we make the best of what we have."

"Tell yon to the savages, an' hear what they say. Well, sir, I'll do my best. An' suppose I find a Canadian trading on our ground, an' refusing to quit—what then?"

"Let the better man of you decide that."

The grey eyes gave a little glint, and he waited a moment for anything else that might be coming, a thick block of humanity with round, arching breast, his features devoid of expression, then went out, leaving a little pool of silence.

"Man, but he's tickled at the thought of being away by himself," laughed the surgeon. "Never before have I heard him put so many words together."

CHAPTER II

LORDS OF THE LAKES AND FORESTS

ON a morning in May, Mr. William McGillvray and Mr. Simon Fraser, merchants and fur traders of Montreal, stood apart on a slight rise on the bank of the little river St. Pierre that came into the great St. Lawrence just above the rapids of Lachine. Its channel had been cleaned and deepened to make a safe and quiet harbourage.

The scene that they now watched held for them a peculiar fascination; they had inspected it often before, but its significance never diminished; it was the departure of the brigade that carried far into the north country and far beyond the confines of Canada the yearly supply of trade goods for the scattered posts of the Northwest Company.

As always on this occasion the situation was vivacious in the extreme with a babble of excited voices in English and French, broken snatches of song, the maudlin complaints of child-like men and the strong speech of the agent or *commis*, who was hard put to assemble his company, many of whom were still sodden with much drink. But beneath the drink and apparent confusion the work of loading went steadily on.

Close at hand floated twenty great canoes—*canots du maître*—each thirty-five feet long, sheathed with tawny

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birchen bark over ribs and laths of white cedar, their seams sewn with fibre of tough spruce root and sealed with pitch or gum from the same friendly tree. The sharp insolent bows and sterns were boldly fashioned, high-riding, proud and painted in fantastic colours, while a rib of white ran clear along the gunwale from stem to stern. In the bottom of each had been laid slim straight poles, and on these, to distribute the pressure, were now being laid with skilful care lest they touch the fragile sides the five tons of burden to be carried to the far end of Lake Superior. This was a matter of a thousand miles.

The company of men, the voyageurs—*les mangeurs de lard*—attendant on this business, were of French or French and native blood, none of them past middle age, short of stature, swarthy of skin, their long dark hair in a tight queue, large of chest, lean of waist, scanty of leg, the upper parts of their bodies being highly developed in discrepancy with their lower limbs. No tall man could be a *coureur de bois*—the canoe offered no room for long legs. They wore tuques or caps of red wool, short shirts bound about the waist with a narrow sash, a breech clout which left the sinewy thighs bare, soft leather or skin leggings to above the knee, moccasins and a bag or pouch. This dress, with a hooded tunic for winter service, was all they knew till arms grew too old to wield a paddle, and legs too unsteady for the punishment of the portage.

One of two long, low, stone-built houses that stood a little way back from the bank was giving up its wares in ninety-pound packages, each with two ears or corners for easier handling, and the fur traders watched the procession with critical eyes, smiling a little when

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a voyageur trotted past, his knees a little bent, with four pieces 360 lbs. weight on his back. The gentlemen wore tight, light-coloured breeches with legs buttoned inside the calves of long boots of fine leather, their cut-away coats were of dark blue cloth, their convoluted neck-cloths gave the pouted effect of pigeon breasts, their hair was in neat queues tied with black silk ribbon under wide-brimmed three-cornered hats, and from time to time they took snuff from flat boxes whose lids snapped smartly shut.

McGillvray, lifting an ebony cane with a silver handle, pointed to a youth who stood a few yards away occupied in checking packages from the warehouse, and sent the two gentlemen occasional side-long glances that conveyed both interest and respect.

"Who is he, Simon?"

"A new apprentice, Neil Campbell. He goes north with the brigade."

"And whither bound?"

"To Archie Macdonald on Buffalo Lake. Macdonald is coming to New Fort this year, and will meet him there."

McGillvray's eyes widened a shade. "Sending a Campbell to a Macdonald! Simon, have you lost your wits?"

Mr. Fraser, smiling, shook his head. "I hope not: nor have I forgotten the Vale of Glencoe, but yon was a lang time syne, and a far cry frae here."

"The men of Argyle are not forgetful either, Simon."

"Perhaps; but there is method in what I am doing, William, method. Archie has been taking trade a bit easy for my taste, and I am thinking a Campbell might have a livening effect—considering the Vale of Glencoe."

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"The Northwest Company is not exactly a missionary institution," shrugged McGillvray, "and nights are long in the north. They are bound to hark back."

"Who knows that better than ourselves? Talk to the youth—talk to him and satisfy yourself. I am thinking I see the making of a real trader behind those eyes."

McGillvray beckoned:—the young man stepped forward, lifting an enormous hand to his forehead and stood awkwardly silent, his grey eyes blank. He had a thatch of tangled sandy hair, his full neck sprang solidly from thick, sharply sloping shoulders, while the pendant arms were so long that the thumbs nigh reached the bony hummocks of his knees. The mouth was wide and firm, the thin lips glowing scarlet with hot, young blood like streaks of smouldering ember against the sprouting gold of his moustache.

McGillvray, measuring this human bullock in a flash, admitted to himself that here indeed might be something to compel the attention of any Macdonald that ever lived. At one hundred pounds for seven years' service he looked to be good value.

"You're for Buffalo Lake, Campbell?"

"I am, sir."

"Your age?"

"Come twenty this March, sir."

"You will serve under a Macdonald—you know that?"

"I do, sir."

"And that whatever Macdonald bids you do is the law?"

"That I am informed, sir." The voice was quiet, the youth's gaze cold as ice.

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"You are alone in this country?"

"It may be I have a father, sir. I do not know."

"You seem poorly informed," smiled McGillvray.

"Did he serve with us?"

"No, sir, but came out to Hudson's Bay fifteen years ago and more. For a while he was in the interior, where we heard he was a chief clerk, but that was years ago. He writes no letters, nor does anything for my mother."

"Then in God's name what brought you to Montreal?"

"The times are hard in Argyle, and while my father's letters did come they did not speak too highly of the service he followed. Also there being nothing for me at home, I consulted with my mother before she died, then sought another part of the new world."

McGillvray turned to Fraser with a dry smile. "Is it a diplomat or a prize-fighter we have here?"

"Go on, William, go on—do your own investigation."

"Are you aware, young man, that it will be your duty and privilege to see that as little trade as may be shall reach any Hudson's Bay Post by way of Buffalo Lake? In other words, you will devote yourself to spoiling your father's business. Also service with us is no better and no worse than with the Hudson's Bay—it is the same thing, except that we ask more from our men, and by God, sir, we get more."

The youth drew himself up, expanding an enormous chest, his open shirt revealing a mat of reddish hair covering his breast like down. Now a flicker in the steady eyes.

"And, by God, sir, I understand that, if you are not

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satisfied with what I give, I will shortly be told so. As to my father's trade, since I was born he has done little for me. I am not beholden there."

McGillvray chuckled, for here was a recruit much to his liking: he put out a hand still strong and sinewy to have it crushed in a grip that made him wince.

"Campbell, I wish you well, and will doubtless hear of you later. My friends, Mr. Frobisher and Monsieur Chaboillez, go as far as New Fort with the brigade, and I will commend you to them. Resume your duties."

The young man saluted, turned a broad back, and resumed his checking of trade goods vomited from the store-house. These bales—and one *canot du maître* would carry the value of a thousand pounds—contained blankets, tobacco—it was Spencer's Twist and Carrot tobacco—woollen cloth and clothing, silk and cotton handkerchiefs, thread, lines, twine, and lead for bullets. With a multitude of other things, there were kegs of liquor—high wine wherewith to stimulate trade, but not to be sold as value—the personal outfit of such officers as would accompany the brigade, a mast and lug sail, ashen setting poles for pushing up rapids, camp-kettles, towing-lines, bark for canoe repairs, gum for the seams and such rudimentary things as necessity demanded.

The two Norwesters watched this cavalcade, speaking but little. They knew it all, their thoughts journeyed back to days not long past, when the Free Traders of Montreal were engaged in so ruinous a competition that, forced into alliance by pressure from the great company to the north, their rivalries were buried to meet a common opponent. But all that might be

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said on that score had been said long since, and now they were concentrated on penetrating ever farther and farther into the far north to tap the furry riches of a country that promised to surpass anything hitherto discovered.

Their attention was drawn to the arrival from Montreal of a *calèche*, a sort of high-wheeled phaeton, with the driver seated low on the draw-bar, his legs extended along the shafts, and from this vehicle descended two gentlemen attired in well-cut travelling clothes of a heavier material than those for city wear. Behind them a cart with travelling gear that was promptly transferred to one of the great canoes.

"Ah, Joseph," said Mr. Fraser, "you are in good time! They will not be away for an hour yet. Charles, I wish I were going with you. The weather promises well."

Mr. Frobisher, who had commanding eyes, a wide, firm mouth and long, straight nose, nodded and betook himself to the store house, while M. Chaboillez drew on a pair of gloves to guard against the mosquitoes which always tortured him during the summer: he was a tall man, of much personal refinement, an astute trader of reputation, one of the few French partners in the Northwest Company.

"To the last moment I had hoped that the Marquis might be with us this year, but when we talked yesterday he was in rather grave mood, and told me that he did not think that ever again would he see *le pays d'en haut*. Also, he is vastly occupied over that new house of his, so we must do without him this time. I think everything will run smoothly at New Fort. Who else travels west to-day?"

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McGillvray, smiling, indicated the apprentice; M. Chaboillez lifted his eye-glass.

"*Mon Dieu, quel monstre Ecossais!* Do you engage these giants by the pound?"

"I would be glad did you sound this young man, and advise me of your conclusions. I wish we had more of them. Charles, I am convinced that on this journey you will need to be circumspect: I am not comfortable about the Americans at Michillimac—they are stealing our trade. At Saulte Ste. Marie you will doubtless take over the goods we sent by way of Kingston and Lake Erie last year. I think you will find the *Otter* above the rapids; she wintered at Point aux Pins, and you might be well suited to command Captain Bennett to convey you to New Fort. Of course that is at your discretion. You and Joseph have selected your canoe?"

M. Chaboillez pointed to the leading one in which a central space had been left vacant, and some bales arranged as seats: not loaded quite so heavily as the others, it floated a little higher, while from bows and stern fluttered small flags.

"You will follow very shortly?"

"Yes, with the others: we will travel fast in express canoes and overtake you."

In the next half-hour something of a miracle was seen as out of seeming confusion, in which many of the participants were still under the influence of the last liquor they would taste for weeks, the brigade resolved itself by instinct into form and order. The moment of departure was approaching, the great adventure about to be faced once more.

The canoes ranged themselves in a long line, headed

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by that of the two partners, the bow-man in position. Standing in the stern, as he would stand so long as his craft was in motion, was the steersman Paul Laronde whose Indian mother, silent and motionless, a shawl over her swarthy head, waited and watched close by. In each canoe were twelve paddlers, or middlemen, fitting lean thighs to springy thwarts, their brains still swimming from a last hasty potion, but already feeling part of the shrewdly built vessel they knew so well. With paddle-tips grounded, they held against the slow pull of the *St. Pierre* as it slid towards the shores of Lachine, and shouted farewells to women, children and old voyageurs with bent backs and wrinkled faces, in whose cooling blood still stirred a yearning for the *pays d'en haut* they would never see again.

Mr. McGillvray and Mr. Fraser watched the embarkation with critical attention, no detail escaping their experienced eyes. This fragile armada, journeying by lake, stream and rapid, freighted with all that the western savages demanded, would in some weeks meet at New Fort, a thousand miles distant, the bearded men who had travelled eastward from remote posts with bales of fur. Then for a space there would be feasting, song, laughter, the affairs of the Northwest Company would be shrewdly discussed and settled, the wintering partners would share with the men from Montreal the information vital to their business; for fur would be exchanged the woollen goods of Manchester, and for scraped hides the crooked knives of Birmingham forges.

"Four hundred thousand pelts is all we shipped last season," said McGillvray thoughtfully, "and this season it should not be less."

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His companion expressed doubt. "William, I am not so sure of the years to come. Yesterday there arrived by the packet from Liverpool a copy of a memorandum submitted by His Lordship of Selkirk to the British Government. You will remember that he dined with us last year, saying very little himself but avid of all the information he could pick up. He now urges the establishment of settlements—farming settlements—think of that—on waters tributary to Hudson's Bay. You see what this would ultimately mean to us?"

"He cannot do it," objected McGillvray, "unless through the English company. And they are stay-at-homes. How much have they done in the past hundred years to open the west? For a hundred years they sit behind their counters at the edge of salt water, and wait till the savages are pleased to come. Do you not agree?"

"That was their custom till not so long ago, but now, I fancy, they are getting over it. I wonder why."

They exchanged a smiling glance, for both responded to the glow of achievement, of daring and successful adventure. These Lords of the Lakes and Forests, till lately Free Traders, had ceased to drain their individual resources by ruthless competition, and fused themselves into the Norwesters. Their sagacity, experience and courage recognized no barriers, and the ancient company on the Hudson's Bay, a too deliberate rival, had cause for thought. The Scots of Montreal, striking north and west, were diverting the stream of trade that had flowed eastward so long to leave its precious deposit in English hands by the salt waters of the Bay. For that company the old easy days of affluence had gone, and its ships now battled back to London through

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Davis Strait, their oaken bellies but scantily lined with fur.

Now Mr. Frobisher came from the storehouse, exchanged a few words with the partners, and with M. Chaboillez took his seat. A rift of wind set the young maple leaves dancing, stimulating the wide sweep of the St. Lawrence so that it appeared to be sprinkled with diamond dust. Mr. Frobisher looked about, behind, around, and raised his hand, whereat Paul Laronde gave one mellow masterful shout, then swept his strong voice into the familiar song of Roulant ma Boule. Instantly the tune was caught up by two hundred and eighty other throats, two hundred and eighty birchen blades struck triumphantly into the shining river, the great canoes became living creatures, one with air, sky and water, and the brigade was in motion.

The snake swam on, quivering with the glint of paddles that scattered diamond drops : like a straitened garland of autumnal leaves it floated, and from it trailed wreaths of distant song. The voyageurs were chanting :

"A la claire fontaine
M'en allant promener,
J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle
Que je m'y suis baigné.
Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublerai."

"It seems long since I first joined in that refrain," said Fraser reminiscently, "yet it is not so many years, and much has happened since. It was just chance that my mother brought me to Canada when my Loyalist father died in prison after Burgoyne's sur-

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render to the Americans. She says that this French blood makes life more gay than it was in the United States. We Scots and Gauls mix well, do we not ? ”

“ Ay, Simon, and between us we'll still make a fine country out here in spite of the English. When do you propose to start from Canada ? ”

“ I will winter this year on the Athabasca, and strike for the western sea as early as the ice permits. It is my purpose to follow to its mouth the River Tacoutche Tesse that our friend Mackenzie departed from when he reached the salt water ten years ago. That river will tell the real story.”

McGillvray nodded. “ This time you will succeed. I have heard of the sea otters taken by the Russians on that coast : the skins are like fine velvet, six feet long, and bring no less than five pounds sterling in London. But look, are there not other craft on Lac St. Pierre ? ”

Far up the river, nearer its south bank, could be discerned the glint of oars.

“ Doubtless the batteaux from Kingston and Lake Erie, so there may be news from Michillimac—let us wait.”

They sat for an hour in conversation concerning matters of the fur trade, and one John Jacob Astor, a German merchant of New York, who did business in Montreal and shipped pelts to England and China. This man of boundless activity aimed at nothing short of dominating the fur trade of the United States : his agents were energetic on the Great Lakes, steadily they pushed on towards the western ocean, and Simon Fraser, whose fixed objective lay in the same direction, perceived here, either a strong ally, or a serious rival.

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"It is in my mind," he ruminated, "that John Jacob knows too much of our affairs for our ultimate comfort : also he is overpersuasive—I cannot listen to that man without believing him, which is hazardous. 'Twas Alexander who discovered the Mackenzie, but it's Jacob who has his eye on it."

McGillvray was inclined to agree with him.

"You fear that he may cut us off on the western sea, as we have our friends on the Bay from the Athabasca?"

"It is possible. And, by God, William, I must get there first."

With the mingled population of Lachine, halfbreeds, French, and Iroquois, they observed the flotilla come to land. These were York boats, strong, flat-bottomed, with high, sharp flaring stems and sterns that enabled them to ride dry through heavy seas. They carried oars, a sail and single mast ; too massive to be portaged without infinite labour, their use was confined to the great lakes and rivers free of precipitous rapids ; and since every true voyageur looked with disdain on all craft propelled by oars, the crews of the flotilla were of hybrid race. They brought packages of fur, many addressed to John Jacob Astor, kegs of salted sea-fish from the United States, wild rice from the swamps bordering Lake Erie, wild tobacco and American goods that had come from New York up the Hudson, then by way of the Oneida country and Oswego river, to the Great Lakes. A well-travelled and not too laborious route.

A number of *calèches* and high-wheeled carts had now assembled ready to transport passengers and goods over the eight-mile toll road that led round the rapids to the

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city of Montreal, and the work of transhipment had begun when Mr. Fraser's attention was drawn to a young man who had just stepped ashore, and was engaged in looking after his luggage.

"William!" he exclaimed, "who is that? I am certain I know the face."

The traveller, who appeared to be about twenty-five, was well-dressed and buttoned, obviously of decent birth. His height was short of medium, and the plainness of somewhat irregular features, nobly redeemed by dark and clustering hair. His eyes had a quality of eagerness, they expressed a sort of magnetic candour, while a beautifully formed mouth promised sympathy and humour. Raising a long-handled lorgnette, he smilingly examined the nearly naked Iroquois half-breed who had shouldered his portmanteau, then looking further about he discerned the two Montrealers. At once he bowed.

Now Mr. Fraser made a gesture:

"I know, it's Tom Moore, the Irish poet! I had it by the last packet from New York that he was in Norfolk and might be coming this way to England." He approached the young man in the most pleasant fashion. "Mr. Thomas Moore, if I am not mistaken?"

The stranger lifted his hat. "The same, sir. And whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"My name, sir, is Simon Fraser and this is my friend and partner Mr. William McGillvray. We are at your service."

Mr. Moore smiled delightfully. "'Tis myself that is fortunate in meeting friends wherever I go."

"You will not lack them in Montreal, sir, where we and our intimates have our own form of hospitality."

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Your *Odes of Anacreon* are not unknown to us—fur traders though we be.”

Mr. Moore, bowing his acknowledgment, looked at them with a bright earnestness that was one of his many charms.

“Is it possible that you gentlemen are of the great Northwest Company?”

“You have then heard of us?” Mr. McGillvray was pleased.

“Assuredly, mere poet though I be. People speak much of you in England and New York, while since I passed the cataract of Niagara on the way here there has been talk of little else. I am in love with this country, gentlemen; next to my own it is the finest I have seen. It excites the imagination.”

“I am glad to hear it—it has the same effect on our own. How long do you stay in Canada?”

“I must take an early packet for Bristol, or perhaps sail on one of His Majesty’s frigates, and shall regret to go. On this side the Atlantic I have met only with kindness. The captain of the vessel that brought me across Lake Ontario, declined any compensation because he knew my verse, while a watchmaker near the gorge of the Niagara repaired my timepiece out of courtesy. Could you tell me of the hotel I should patronize in your city?”

“Not any hotel, sir, my house is at your disposition,” put in Mr. McGillvray promptly. “As for entertainment, we of the Northwest Company have our own ideas of which you will shortly learn. Simon, perhaps you will drive Mr. Moore to Montreal: I must stay here on business for a few moments, but if you travel at leisure I will overtake you.”

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Mr. Fraser being more than ready, they set out in his *calèche* over the upper Lachine road and immediately Mr. Moore's questions began.

"Lachine, sir? If I mistake not, that is the French for China—surely a strange name for a Canadian settlement."

"That is quite true: the name was given in irony after le Sieur Lasalle set out hence more than a hundred years ago expecting ultimately to arrive in China. The name has persisted."

The young man smiled: his eyes, very bright and restless, roving everywhere as he swayed to the motion of the *calèche*.

"You have journeyed far?" asked Mr. Fraser.

"Last year I left England for Bermuda, being appointed registrar for the naval prize court in that island, but lacking any war with Spain there was a shortage of prizes and life grew so dull that I asked to be relieved."

The older man was impressed: he had journeyed in hazardous fashion thousands of miles through wild tribes in a wild country, and nearly to the western sea, but considered himself no real traveller: he had seen nothing of England or Scotland, while his youthful companion knew the outer world, was friend with its great ones. But one could not have told this from a manner both engaging and modest.

The *calèche* swayed on, its driver's legs enclosing the rump of a short-bodied French-bred horse, the passengers perched in a high-sided, leather-lined box suspended in broad straps. This turnpike, the only toll highway in lower Canada, passed at first through a flat agricultural country and across the long parallelo-

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grams of habitants' highly cultivated farms with their steep-roofed and verandahed houses, but when it rose to higher ground, the eye swept over a wide and peaceful expanse where not long since an unbroken forest re-echoed to the war cries of marauding Indians; and because this portion of the island of Mont Royal had once formed a portion of the bed of the St. Lawrence, it was now remarkably fertile. To the south, behind a fringe of tall trees, the rapids of St. Louis were visible tossing their broken crests in white and formidable confusion. From this village of Lachine, with its mingled population of French and Indian, came most of the voyageurs of the Norwesters.

Mr. Moore listened with increasing interest to all that Mr. Fraser told him.

"You, sir, will meet many of us, and we will be proud to meet the Irish poet. We are for the most part Scots, and many of our families came to this country soon after the battle of Culloden in order to see less of the English. There are, of course, not a few English amongst us, but"—and here Mr. Fraser gave a slight toss to his firm chin—"our ways are somewhat divided. I would not go so far as to say that we still object to the English, but our views and qualities are dissimilar. Personally, I find the Englishman well-meaning but very awkward, especially in the woods and in dealing with savages—excepting always the family of Frobisher."

Mr. Moore admitted that by one of his own Celtic derivation this was easily understood: from time to time he had been studying his companion's face—an unusual countenance, with broad masterful brow, short strong nose, firm lips and chin. Mr. Fraser's hair

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clustered thick and dark, his features suggested a thrusting determined disposition, a short neck was squarely set on powerful shoulders, and the young man found pleasure in exploring the opinions of so bold and dominant an individual.

"At the same time, sir, my first publisher, to whom I am ever grateful, is an Englishman, and his Royal Highness Prince George of Wales accepted the dedication of my *Anacreon*, so the English have done me handsomely. But tell me more of your great company."

"It was founded by Simon McTavish, whom you will meet, and has justified all his expectations, but recently we have had opposition from a second company, also Scots. It is called the XY."

"Are those hieroglyphics with a hidden meaning?"

"No, but the next letters following the NW with which our packages are marked for convenience in the shipping. The XY is at present led by Sir Alexander Mackenzie."

"Surely I have read his monograph! Did he not discover the great river that leads to the icy north?"

"That is the man. He, and our Mr. McTavish—often called the Marquis—are equally proud and haughty, and will not come to terms, though this does not prevent their social intercourse. There I believe it will stand till death beckons one of them aside—but they drink wine together at the Beaver Club."

"I have heard of the Beaver Club, sir, what is it?"

"Nineteen of us came together just nineteen years ago, all having spent at least one season in the *pays d'en haut*, the country of the savages, far from the amenities of city life. Many of us have passed years in

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that isolation, seeing no white faces but our own, and often preserving our lives with difficulty. Some of our experiences would sound fantastic. The purpose of our club is therefore not only to stimulate our trade, but also to soften the effect of so hard a life, to smooth out its inevitable gaucheries, and accustom our members to the social side of civilization. I think we are not unsuccessful : we dine together, not badly as you will shortly learn, and have our guests of distinction ; his Lordship of Selkirk sat with us last year, leaving us in considerable doubt as to his future intentions—though he is a fine young man, also Mr. John Jacob Astor of whom you will have heard in New York. Mr. Astor has a head on his shoulders. And there, sir," added Mr. Fraser, ordering the driver to halt, "before you is Montreal."

Mr. Moore, much interested, compared what he saw with the flimsy wooden structures characteristic of New York, and the florid voluptuousness of the Bermúdas : he found it spacious, dignified and serene ; it had a sort of Scottish solidity ; the slopes of Mont Royal descending suavely to the great river seemed to invite the narrow streets to climb still farther. This spot, the gateway to a vast interior, the home of multitudes yet unborn, had a proportion of its own. The flanks of the mountain commanded a striking view, and to the east beyond the green island of Ste. Helène the St. Lawrence flowed grandly to the sea.

"On my faith, sir, you Canadians have a great heritage !" exclaimed the young man.

"We would be proud," smiled Mr. Fraser, "if it moved your poetical genius to some expression of what you have just said."

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Mr. Moore, colouring slightly, seemed a little self-conscious and touched his breast pocket.

"I have to confess that the impulse has already seized me—perhaps you may hear of it later."

"I am gratified to know it. Shall we drive on slowly till Mr. McGillvray overtakes us?"

Mr. Moore nodded.

"There, sir, at the corner of the Place d'Armes is Dillon's Montreal Hotel—its interior you will see later—there the Seminary of St. Sulpice with its gardens behind—here down St. Joseph Street is the Hôtel Dieu—let us go that way. This is St. Paul Street the business artery: the house of our founder Mr. Simon McTavish—otherwise the Marquis—is on your left in St. Gabriel Street, but he is building a much finer one on the mountain slope where he will welcome his wife on her early return from England. Our counting-house and warehouse stand close by his present domicile, also that of Mr. Astor, whom you are likely to meet. There is the Scots Kirk, which we of the Northwest Company attend."

Descending, they approached the steep river-bank where vessels of some hundreds of tons burden were moored close against the shore, with inclined gangways along which walked men burdened with boxes and bales. A little to the west, was the general hospital of the Grey Nuns: opposite in quiet water floated great rafts of timber from western districts, and on them still lived the woodsmen who convoyed these islands down the St. Lawrence and through the rapids of St. Louis. Into one vessel through an opening in her bows baulks of timber were being drawn for passage to England, and beside it lay the canoes of Iroquois

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Indians from the settlement across the river. Within the grey walls of Bonsecours Market sounded a babble of voices in three languages whither habitants from neighbouring settlements brought the products of their farms.

"Some of the goods you see unloaded are for trade in the *pays d'en haut*," explained Mr. Fraser, "and four months hence we should be shipping our winter take of furs, the more fragile and precious being packed inside the others for protection; they go by way of the Custom House at Quebec. Owing to the conditions of our business, the distance traversed and other impediments, it is four years before we realize our profit in cash, which is a very long time. I trust," he added smiling, "that poets get more prompt returns."

"I might say," countered Mr. Moore, "that from my own experience the poet is much overpaid for the mere flowering of his imagination: it has surprised me that my work—if indeed it is work—should have so quickly gained a commercial value. No—it is men like you and your partners who are the real poets, the real builders and makers, and put your dreams into human action."

Mr. Fraser, who like many men of affairs had conceived for literary personages a sort of spontaneous homage without in the least knowing why, was much flattered.

"Very prettily said, sir, but your verses will live long after our small accomplishments. Now Mr. McGillvray will be awaiting you, so let us make for his mansion. I expect shortly to meet you at dinner."

The Montreal Hotel, a two-storied stone building

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with gabled roof, stood on the north side of the Place d'Armes, and Richard Dillon—he had come to Canada as a retainer of my Lord Dorchester—was a fair artist, a sagacious host and man of good repute. After the death of his patron, he invested his savings in this establishment, which soon became the meeting-place of the Norwesters and favoured by travellers of taste and distinction. It had a reputation for cellar and cuisine. Dillon was a strong monarchist and celebrated every national occasion with lavish fireworks. Here, two days after his arrival at Lachine, Mr. Moore was bidden to dine.

Conducted by Mr. McGillvrày, he found himself in a long, low-ceilinged panelled room with a large fireplace. The night was mild, and through open windows he could see in the Place d'Armes funereal figures of Ursuline Sisters, strutting militia privates, tuqued habitants, priests and cowled monks, sailors from the harbour, voyageurs, woodsmen from the timber rafts, Iroquois Indians trailed by squaws carrying on their backs copper-faced infants packed in moss and lashed to wooden frames. There were farmers with loads of hay and wood, gentry and their ladies driving tandem in *calèches*, Scots clerks and their French sweethearts. A clatter of unshod hooves came from cobbled streets, old women sat smoking strong tobacco at their doorsteps, and the unmusical jangle of a multitude of bells sounded from Roman Catholic institutions dominating the city.

Mr. McGillvray, having already made known in Montreal the arrival of the poet, now introduced him to the notables present, chief of whom Mr. Simon McTavish was married to a sister of M. Charles

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Chaboillez. Born in the Highlands, and now about fifty years of age, he was a man of great energy, and with the brothers Frobisher stood foremost in the affairs of the Northwest Company.

Then to Sir Alexander Mackenzie of commanding presence, for whom Mr. Moore showed the greatest respect.

"I read your book, sir : I took it with me to the Bermudas where the account of your journey to the northern seas, and later to La Grande Mer de l'Ouest was in contrast with my tropical surroundings. It gave me an actual chill of admiration."

"My thanks, sir, and I have read your *Anacreon*, so my debt is the greater : you explore human emotion while I have merely determined a few geographical facts."

At this affectation from one who was not forgetful of his own achievements, Mr. McGillvray sent the poet a sly wink and completed his introduction.

Came Roderick Mackenzie, who had married another sister of M. Chaboillez, and since there were four of his name among the partners and clerks, they had been distinguished as Le Rouge, Le Blanc, Le Borgne—the one-eyed—and Le Picote—the pock-marked. This gentleman had literary pretensions, and Mr. Moore found himself quite at home. He met, too, officers of the Sixtieth Regiment in epaulettes and tight-waisted red tunics carrying rows of burnished brass buttons, a few English gentry visiting Montreal, Mr. John Johnson, superintendent of Indian affairs for the government, another Mr. Johnson, a notable Irish trader at Sault Ste. Marie, Judge Ogden of the Montreal Bench, and Mr. John Jacob Astor. This gentle-

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man of striking appearance with long thin nose, large observant eyes, a mouth at once firm and flexible, was observed by Mr. Moore to receive considerable attention from the Canadians.

Host Dillon announcing that dinner was served, the poet found himself seated at the right hand of Mr. McTavish, who at once began to talk.

"We are fortunate to have you with us to-day, sir, for there is about to be a scattering of the clans, and many of our number will follow the brigade in express canoes to Lake Superior for our annual gathering. By fast travel and but one trip over the portages, we can save a fortnight. What will you drink, Mr. Moore? Some of us begin with porter, proceeding with sherry and madeira, then port. Excuse me if I take but little—the health of my stomach leaves much to be desired."

Mr. Moore, who had already heard of the conviviality of these meetings, expressed his readiness for all four, and gave himself up to complete enjoyment. Men-servants now began to carry in great platters of boiled fish, young venison killed on the northerly slopes of Mont Royal, roasted ducks, wild rice with a flavour of nuts, syrup from the sap of the hard maple tree, early vegetables. Corks began to fly, and within a few moments the affair lost all formality: the young man found himself continually toasted by gentlemen who rose glass in hand, bowed and offered felicitations: the crisp accents of Scots made sharp contrast from the softer speech of English born, potent liquor began to take effect, gusts of laughter grew louder, and Mr. Moore, expanding to the situation, plied Mr. McTavish with questions.

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"You have no members of the Hudson's Bay here, sir?"

"God forbid, unless they are in disguise. We are mostly Scots in Montreal—Scots and, thank God, French: what unites us in spite of a natural rivalry with each other, is our mutual opposition to that undertaking on the Bay. Eh, Sir Alec?"

"It is quite true," nodded Mackenzie; "also we are busily occupied in cutting each others' throats which is unprofitable. I have written to our friend and partner Mr. William Ellice—he is now in England—asking him to make another attempt to buy out our rivals and have done with it. If not that, we must acquire a legal right to use the Hudson's Bay route to the *pays d'en haut*."

"Which they will not sell," put in Mr. Astor. "They may make little profit at present, thanks to you gentlemen, but that company does not worry about the future, so why should they sell? I foresee the time when you will come to friendly terms."

This was received with a roar of laughter, but the American held his ground.

"Would you ally your interests with ours to fight them?" asked Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Astor, smiling, shook his head: his dream was too great for that: he aimed at nothing short of personal control of the fur trade on the western sea before the Northwest Company could establish themselves on that coast: he would cut them off just as they had cut off the Englishmen from Athabasca, and Simon Fraser was the most dangerous man he had to reckon with. Now watching that strong determined face he could not resist the temptation of the moment.

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"I have to-day something of interest in a dispatch from Washington," he said blandly, "and the Government of the United States has organized an expedition to the Pacific to prepare the way for American settlement."

This announcement attracted general attention: Sir Alexander stared, Mr. Fraser lifted his heavy brows.

"You said the Government?"

"I did. It will be led by Captains Merriweather Lewis and William Clarke of the American army, taking soldiers as escort through the countries of the savages. Their route will be by the territory of the Mandan Indians on the Missouri River, who are known to your company. Thence it is intended to cross the Rocky Mountains and follow the Columbia River to salt water, where good fur is plentiful. A virgin country for trade, gentlemen, and there I would establish a post."

Mr. Fraser and his partners received this with feelings to which they gave no expression. It was grave news. Mackenzie at constant risk of his life, had already made an arduous journey to the western sea, but that was all, and no posts had been established. Mr. Fraser had not quite reached it, so the Norwesters enjoyed no trade on those rich shores; nor could they transport goods overland from Montreal across the continent and compete with others who drew supplies from the United States. The only hope lay in some kind of co-operation, but none of the partners felt quite sure of Mr. Astor.

"If this expedition should pass through territories occupied by us," said Mr. McTavish calmly, "we shall, of course, give every assistance, but I trust that

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it will not impede the corn that the Mandans bring us to Canada."

Mr. Astor, assuring him that such a thing was most improbable, took sparingly of wine and broached another subject to Judge Ogden who sat near him; he had been watching Mr. Fraser and felt content, but the rest of the Norwesters, to whom this news was of much import, continued to discuss it, forgetting for the moment the guest of the evening.

Mr. Moore resented this not at all: the company fascinated him; it made him feel very young, and examining the weather-marked faces of his hosts his lively imagination was stimulated, for here sat the Lords of the Lakes and Forests. Inured to danger, hardship and fatigue, they were making the western continent their own, no venture was too perilous to be faced, they did business with savage races, they dealt in great affairs. To his mind they were chief actors in a drama surpassing any he had ever read; he could but guess at the vicissitudes they must have encountered, but here one found only gaiety and high spirits.

As the evening progressed he heard a succession of tales of strange peoples. Mr. John Frobisher described Indian necromancers able to foretell the future, while Sir Alexander told of arctic hunters with slanting oriental eyes, who used bows of springy bone and devoured the raw flesh of sea monsters that were hardly dead.

Now the company honoured the five toasts to the Mother of All Saints, the King, the fur trade in all its branches, voyageurs, wives and children and absent members. The calumet, or Indian ceremonial pipe fashioned in soap stone, was lit and passed from man

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to man. It was after this that the serious business of drinking began ; porter was swamped by port, there came a general loosening of neck-cloths and marked increase of conviviality ; Mr. Moore heard sudden wild warwhoops and snatches of savage chanting in a strange and haunting monotone, and his own head was commencing to swim when Mr. Fraser, swaying a little, got to his feet with an Iroquois yell that compelled general attention.

“ Guests and fellow-members : we are honoured by the presence of one whose name is loved wherever the English language is spoken. Two days ago at Lachine there was made captive the person of Mr. Thomas Moore, the Irish poet, and to-night he sits at our table.”

This announcement was received with a roar of cheers. Mr. Moore coloured deeply, rose, bowed in all directions and resumed his seat.

“ Observe,” chanted Mr. Fraser, his blood growing every moment more mellow, “ how the blush of modesty mantles the brow of youthful genius. I doubt if any member of our club could achieve the same—we are too old—gentlemen—too old, too steeped in hard experience, but we have read, some of us, the poet’s *Odes of Anacreon*, and shame to those who have not. I do not hesitate to apos—apos—” here he halted, the wine in him very active and sent the young man a wide smile of extreme good nature—“ to apostrophize,” he continued in a triumphant bellow, “ I say it again, apostrophize such members as delinquent dullards. Let them see to it and put the matter right. I call on you to drink the health of Mr. Thomas Moore.”

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This toast being honoured with many hurrahs and much breakage of glass, the young man made appropriate reply, and was about to reseal himself when Mr. McGillvray interposed ;

"I understand, sir, that our country has already moved you to poetic expression."

Mr. Moore, nodding, blushed again and there came a shout and hammering on the table.

"Read it ! Read it, sir. By God, we stay till you do."

From this demand there could be no escape : he bowed again, glancing at Mr. McTavish who made a gesture of approval.

"It is true, gentlemen, that on my journey down the St. Lawrence from Kingston I did write a few verses, also having some slight pretention to music I composed an air that might suitably accompany them. I have been given to understand that I sing less deplorably than I speak, so if there is any instrument——"

He was interrupted by a roar of "Dillon ! Dillon ! Where is that old bastard Dillon ?"

Mr. Richard Dillon, rosy of cheek, portly of belly, put his head in : he must have been just beyond the door.

"The spinet !" chanted the Norwesters, "bring the spinet !"

Mr. Dillon hurried away, two men servants appeared carrying the desired instrument, placing it against the wall, and Mr. Moore stepping with extreme care, for his head also was reacting to the wine, seated himself and laid his long flexible fingers on the keys. At their cool familiar touch his brain cleared, and he began to sing in a true and very pleasing voice :

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Faintly as tolls the evening chime
Our voices keep tune and our oars keep time,
Soon as the woods on shore grow dim
We'll sing at Ste. Anne's our evening hymn.
Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast.
The rapids are near and the daylight's past.

Why should we yet our sail unfurl?
There is not a breath the blue wave to curl,
But when the wind blows off the shore
Oh sweetly we'll rest our weary oar.
Blow, breezes, blow, the stream runs fast.
The rapids are near and the daylight's past.

At his first words the room became silent : as he sang on the Norwesters—the childhood of most had been spent in the wildness of Scottish Highlands and poetry was in their nature—turned to each other with understanding eyes and nodded. They knew what this stranger sang of ; all the beauty and mystery of the story of the voyageur were there as in their dreams they themselves had visioned it, but now it came from the lips of a stranger, a young interpreter who had captured and given it life and form.

Mr. Moore sang on : in his soul he knew that what he had written would live, but had rather that it be accepted and approved by these men than by any other audience in the world.

Then a little shakily he regained his seat.

He was rewarded by a hush ; the song had gone home where it was meant to go, and Mr. McTavish rose to express thanks.

"We will remember it," he said, "our voyageurs and their children will sing it ; by many a camp-fire it will be heard when the flame burns low and the waters lie quiet. And now, gentlemen of the North-

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west Company," he added with a lift in his voice, "let us give Mr. Moore a song of our own. To your places, partners all."

This summons was obeyed with a scramble and ear-splitting whoops that rang far across the empty square of Place d'Armes ; the summit of the night's entertainment had been reached, and the Norwesters pushing back their chairs, perched in precarious balance on the edge of the table amidst a further crashing of glass. In two parallel rows they ranged in the posture of middlemen in a *canot du maître* ; they were voyageurs *en route* and afloat, all young again and held in thrall by the old wild life. At one end of the table stood the Marquis as steersman, Mr. Fraser occupied the bow : then all grasping pokers, sticks, long silver ladles, or the nearest article with which to simulate the long stroke of the tireless paddle, they burst into the familiar air of La Claire Fontaine.

This notable spectacle provided the last recollection of that evening retained with any clarity by Mr. Moore.

CHAPTER III

THE BRIGADE GOES WEST

YOUNG Neil Campbell, his rump on a package of Manchester woollens, leaned back and absorbed his surroundings. The brigade was now ascending the St. Lawrence towards the rapids of Ste. Anne ; on his left the waters were sea green having come from the rocky wilderness through the gorge of the Niagara, but to the right a tawny brown from the confluent Ottawa : the shores slid steadily by ; he was aware of a symposium of swaying backs, tilted shoulders, lean bent arms and the swinging dip of wide thin yellow paddles. The split river gurgled as it moiled against the golden sides of the great canoe, the sun shone, the wild air breathed sweet from the wooded land.

Now the rapids of Ste. Anne where the Ottawa leaving the calm expanse of the Lake of Two Mountains, plunged into the larger flood, and here it was that no true voyageur might pass on his westward way without due propitiation and offering a vow to the Saint whose shrine lifted a sharp pointed spire hard by the roaring river. This stood on the westerly end of the isle of Mont Royal, and beyond it in all the country of the savages no other altar had yet been raised.

Here Neil watched and wondered ; he saw the sons of the lake and forest make obeisance, drop an offering

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in the box, mumble a prayer the memory of which faded as they mumbled, then address themselves to the business of the hour. He saw them, slighter than himself, with loads on their backs that would have defied his own strength, go lightly across the portage, knees a little bent, legs and ankles like steel springs, arms swinging loose, heads thrust forward in a loop of creaking leather. And many a man carried double his own weight.

This being a *décharge* where the canoes might be pulled to higher waters with but a fraction of their burden, he saw them worked out into the stream, answering to the strain of a taut line, their fragile frames within a hand's breadth of rupture, mounting the rush of the tortured river, while straining poles and paddles fended them from fanged rocks that waited wickedly in a tumult of foam. It did not appear to his young eyes that they could survive this, but wisdom, strength and experience were at work, and before long they were all reassembled, floating lightly in a quiet pool, while the small lithe men reloaded them as before, each package resting exactly where it had been placed at Lachine.

The voyageurs paid the young clerk no attention, save only one to whose charge he had been committed till he knew enough to fend for himself, and Neil, having no desire to talk was glad of it: his intelligence imposed a proper silence in the midst of so much that was new and strange, and his thoughts went back to the fur house where he had worked in Montreal. Life had been strange there too, but not so strange as this. He was about to take his place, when he heard a quiet voice at his side.

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"Good day, sir ; I see that you are alone—would you like company ? "

Before him stood a middle-aged man, brown bearded, with flashing eyes, a great hook of a nose and lips with a curve of humour.

"You are very kind, sir, and I would be glad of it."

The stranger made a sign to the guide, who nodded, then he motioned the young man in and took the place beside him. Now there was a pause, while each man pulled off his red cap and one of them uttered a final prayer. Then with a thrust of paddles the leading canoe turned out, a familiar whisper of water began again, and the spire of Ste. Anne's dwindled to the thinness of a needle.

"You are Neil Campbell," said the stranger pleasantly, "and I am Duncan Cameron : you are posted to Buffalo Lake while I go farther into the interior, but there will be time to talk of that. How long have you been in Canada ? "

Neil told him, also that he was engaged by Mr. Fraser.

"A great man that, and his name will live ; I was with him when he tried to reach the western sea from the Athabasca, of which I will tell you some other time. You are alone in this country ? "

"If my father lives, he is with the Hudson's Bay," said Neil bluntly.

"And his son with the Northwest Company ! A pretty case."

"I take it there is room for us both."

"There is room," said Mr. Cameron, "for all the Scots that Scotland will breed in the next century. I

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"I am thinking we'll make our mark in this country. You know what lies in front of you?"

"I have been advised of my duty, sir, and I am ready to do it."

"Duty," reflected the other man, "there is so much more than duty that awaits you. Observe these voyageurs, their mixture of Scotch, French and Iroquois blood, their disposition, their mood changing like the sky; they are gay, happy, morose, combative, cruel, kind, forgetful—but they do their duty. That is all that is asked of them, the rest being forgotten, but with you it will be different."

"How different?" asked Neil.

"It is for them to serve with bodies and back and arms, and their lives are full of change: these are the *mangeurs de lard*, the pork-eaters, who journey west to New Fort and no farther, but they are not the true *coueurs de bois* whom you will find beyond Canada. In perhaps four months they will be back with their families at Lachine, but with you it is otherwise. In four years you may not see four different white men, nor certainly one white woman. You have doubtless thought of this?"

"I have not known what to think, sir. Will you not fill from my pouch?"

Mr. Cameron shook his head. "Presently the steersman will halt and say '*Allumez*,' which means, light your pipes for one smoke of five minutes. Till then it is as well to desist. For the rest of it," he continued with the manner of one who knows of what he speaks, "you will find that your mind is more called on than your body, hardships though there be. In winter the days are short and nights long: the savages come and

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go, also you will come and go amongst them, but always you will be cast on your own resource. Life and death may hang on your decision. You and your bourgeois will be lords of the district you occupy. Who is your bourgeois ? ”

“ Mr. Archie Macdonald. ”

“ A Campbell under a Macdonald ? ”

“ It was not of my choosing ; I am ready for it. ”

“ Well, it may be that the waters of Buffalo Lake will dissolve the bloodstains of Glencoe, but it wouldn't work across the sea. Was that the choosing of Mr. Fraser ? ”

“ I cannot tell. Are there no women in the country I go to ? ”

“ Savage ones, Campbell, savage ones, but their breasts are soft and their blood is warm ; you can take which one you choose and she will be proud to come. I have had two wives, one on Isle a la Crosse, another on the Athabasca. In the strong woods it is better to return to a native woman than a white one, especially in winter time. ”

Neil sent him a glance of surprise : in spite of a roughness of appearance this man had the characteristics of good birth ; his features were finely modelled, his brown hands well-shaped ; while he talked there lurked in his eye a glint of humour, but what he had just said was obviously sincere.

“ You have been long in this country, sir ? ”

“ All my life, and no less. My father was a Highland Jacobite who gave most of his blood for Prince Charles Edward Stuart, sixty years ago ; then we Camerons were proscribed with many another Highlander, and he fled to Canada from the grip of Butcher Cumber-

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land. When he journeyed north to the Bay to trade he found the damned English already there, so it appeared that he had fled in vain, and presently turned south and west to the country of the Sioux and Mandans, where shortly he was killed. But being very bald his scalp was not taken. This I had years later from the son of the man whose knife it was that killed him."

He spoke quietly, reflectively, as though it were a matter of past interest only; his manner had a poise; one could see that great experience lay behind it, that his future would probably hold no less of drama, and he contemplated it with complete assurance.

"I should like to hear anything more you care to say, sir." The young man was much impressed.

"Of what?"

"Of what you choose."

"Then I would say that you have come to this country when the fur trade of the Canadians is being torn asunder by stiff-necked rivalries which cannot last much longer or the business will revert to the English on the Bay, who are at least of one mind in this affair. Have you paid your respects to Mr. Simon McTavish?"

"I did not have the privilege."

"But you know of him?"

"The head of this company?"

"Head, shoulders, brain and bowels," nodded Mr. Cameron, "and that is the trouble—so masterful is he that between him and Sir Alec there is nothing short of a feud. They will sink this on social occasions such as the dinners of the Beaver Club, but the fire of opposition still lives beneath, and Sir Alec leads the

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XY. Five years ago, not being able to stomach the domination of Mr. McTavish, he expressed this intention and could not be moved from it."

"I have seen him ; he looks determined."

"They are both determined."

"*Allumez !*"

Paul Laronde had lifted his paddle, tapping it smartly on the great high bows, the signal ran back along the line, and the dipping blades came to rest. There was an opening of pouches, a rubbing of Spencer's Twist in leathery palms, the big canoes lost their impetus and floated like tired gulls on the glassy bosom of the lake. Now a striking of flints, a blowing of dry tinder and the oblation was offered in silence. Cameron also began to smoke nor spoke again till progress was resumed, when he pushed a brown finger into his bowl lest a shred of the precious stuff be lost.

"But it is true that we trade in the same districts with the same savages?" asked Neil curiously.

"The rival posts are not seldom in sight of each other, and there lies the danger. To the savages there is no difference between us except that they will trade with those whose liquor flows most freely : in places there are three posts so that he may trade at any one."

"But does this not soon rob the district of fur?"

"Of a certainty, therefore we and the XY and the English are pushing farther west and north every year, which brings about hot encounters in the *pays d'en haut*. But a twelvemonth ago Mr. McTavish sent his own ship into the very bay itself to trade under the nose of the English, though his partners consider him ill-advised

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in the matter. The real trouble is what the English claim as their privilege on all waters running into the Bay : so long as they maintain it there will be blood shed between men who deserve a better fate. At the same time should a man of the Bay or of the XY be cast by sickness or accident upon your hospitality, you will not withhold it. That is the law of the north."

With this he fell silent, occupied with thoughts that shrouded him in a sort of cloak, but what he had already said had gone deep : it was enough to give the newly indentured clerk a fair conception of what he would encounter in the first seven years of service, and the picture thus drawn was not the one his own dreams had presented. He had imagined himself in rivalry with his father on the Bay, but that was all ; he had no conception of the country he was about to enter, its distances and manifold waterways, no conception of the great silent emptiness of those regions and the fullness of spirit with which it must be met to win success. He had reached Canada two months earlier in a Bristol packet ; in Montreal he watched with admiration the fine equipages of the merchant princes of the Northwest Company and gazed at their comfortable houses ; sorting furs in their warehouse he had heard tales that fired the blood ; once he had peered through the windows of Dillon's hotel and caught a glimpse of the partners banqueting in opulent ease, but of the stark preliminaries preceding that ease he had no knowledge at all.

At the same time he was without fear. The strength of his body and cool deliberate nature qualified him for the task he had assumed : he welcomed the future

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whatever it might bring; and to-day on its threshold was well content to listen to this man who knew so much more than himself.

All afternoon and into the cool of the evening the brigade swept on, following close to the shore where the flood of the Ottawa made a backwater that was favourable, and cutting across its width from timbered point to point to avoid the stream's full thrust. Now Mr. Cameron glanced at the sun; much magnified in summer haze, it appeared to float for an instant like a great orange balloon just above the horizon.

"Presently we halt for the night, and on this journey, whatever your impulse, do nothing manual; do not carry your own luggage over a portage. Your gun, yes, but not your luggage—that is the affair of these middlemen, and to hold their respect you must remember that you are above them. Voyaging with this brigade however you will set up your own tent when you need it. Later, in winter travel, there are occasions when all work may be equally shared, but for that you will rely upon your own perception. These voyageurs, Campbell, do not expect ever to be anything else and they are content, but it is not so with you."

At last Paul Laronde gave his canoe a slanting direction towards shore, the dipping paddles slackened speed, the long undulating snake travelled more slowly, at the same time increasing the distance between its members. With the length of the brigade thus multiplied, the craft in the rear were hardly visible in swift coming dusk, so fast was descending the darkness; it seemed to spread from the west, overflow the land

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and leave only a wide crimson stain where so lately the sun had vanished.

With increasing chatter the unloading began. First to leap ashore were cooks and their helpers ; at once the note of action sounded and a line of fire sprang to life bordering the bay's slow curve where encampment was made. A supper was hastily cooked and swallowed, then the great kettles were swung to be filled two-thirds with water, into them poured a quartation of dried peas for each man feeding from it, with their portions of fat pork for seasoning. This food for the morrow would simmer all night over hot coals when broken biscuit would be added to bursted and softened peas that had sucked in the savour of the pork, and ere dawn the voyageurs surrounding this vessel of potent steaming mush would ply each a wooden ladle to fill his clamorous stomach. They asked nothing more and nothing better. The big canoes, carefully fended from touching bottom, had been unloaded, the pieces piled and covered, lastly the canoes themselves lifted out and overturned. Should rain fall, the voyageurs might sleep beneath them.

Neil, with the privilege of a clerk, boiled tea to share with his companion, and the night being clear put up no tent : a voyageur had cut cedar boughs for his couch and here he stretched with a mind emptied of speech. Silence had spread along the shore ; nigh three hundred men were already plunged in sleep, a single blanket drawn over their heads to defeat mosquitoes now attracted in swarms, the only figures who stirred were those of cooks who tended the long ranks of fires. A flicker revealed some of the others curled in patches of soft moss like creatures of the forest, some

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lying flat on the warm dry sand, not far off amongst these shadows rested Mr. Frobisher and M. Chaboillez, who had fared luxuriously on a private stock of provisions prepared by their own cook brought from Montreal and washed down with French wine and old brandy. The young man knew better than to attempt to address them uninvited—they might speak to him on this journey and they might not.

“You will notice,” said Mr. Cameron sucking at his pipe, “that there has been celerity but no confusion: I have seen a brigade awake, eat, load and be *en route* in less than one half-hour from the first call by the cooks. That is why to-morrow’s food is being prepared to-night. From Montreal to New Fort the ration is of peas, corn or perhaps wild rice from Lake Erie; beyond that it will be pemmican from the buffalo country—the most sustaining food in the world.

There were many things that the young man wanted to ask, but now sleep overtook him so he put but one question—

“Beyond New Fort will the journey be like to-day?”

“No, for what you now see is a river of trade goods in full volume, but farther on the canoes will diminish in size for always their length and burden are proportionate to the waters they must traverse: the goods will also dwindle, going out in little streams to feed the scattered posts of the *pays d’en haut*. Finally, this river will be but a single trickle of a few men with the last pieces for the last posts of all, and of those you see here only one will be there.”

“Where?” asked Neil drowsily.

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"At Fort George astride the Rocky Mountains, my destination."

Neil hardly heard him ; the cedar boughs were so soft and springy.

CHAPTER IV

AT NEW FORT

SIX weeks later the brigade was approaching New Fort. Up the Ottawa it had foiled, ascending cataracts where beneath dripping cedars rough-hewn crosses sanctified the broken shores, each of them with the carven name of some voyageur beaten to death among the long-fanged rocks, and here the red-caps of the brigade came off with many a muttered prayer to the good Ste. Anne. Heading for the point where the Mattawa river joined the Ottawa, some thirty portages were mounted, half of them *décharges*, then up the Mattawa, then through small waterways over a height of land to La Rivière des François. Here at last the current favoured, with laughter and relief they cast away the setting poles and glided effortless downstream till its mouth broadened into the wide expanse of Lake Huron. Next a great bay with innumerable islands low of shore, covered with thickly growing pine and spruce, over two hundred miles of quiet water to the island of Michillimac.

This small round hump, eight hundred miles from Montreal, was called by the Indians the Shape of the Turtle : for centuries their meeting-point now it was the great trade depot and distributing centre of the west : with high central plateaux and beaches of white

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sand it lay where two great lakes met together and not far away stretched the third greatest of all, Lake Superior, the Big Sea Water, the Gitchee Gumme of the native tribes.

Here were long warehouses of different trading companies, here came schooners from the lower lakes, from Michigan and the Illinois country and Oswego with Indian corn from the south to reprovision the westerly bound brigades and bolster the supply from the native village of L'Arbre Croche, twenty miles distant. Hence were shipped furs to American territory: here bourgeois, partner and *commis*—these latter being travelling overseers of every brigade—conducted their business, rearranging the routing and destination of canoes: for these men of affairs the stay at Mackinac was busy and responsible, while for the voyageurs, for guides and middlemen there were nights of rest and gaiety, of song and drinking, dancing and love-making with Indian women, young and passionate and willing, assembled from neighbouring islands, so that when the day of embarkation dawned the *commis* were hard driven to recollect their companies. Here, too, the brigade was joined by a group of partners who had left Lachine three weeks later, and with hard paddling and but one trip across the portages the express canoes halved the time in transit.

Now the last and most perilous leg of the journey when the brigade moved up the Ste. Marie river to Sault Ste. Marie, where through half a mile of tortured cascades Lake Superior plunged towards the ocean. Here, to ease the labour of portaging, the Northwest Company had built for their private use and none other, a tiny lock just long enough to receive a

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canot du maître and lift it half-way up the pitch, till through the divergent stream that fed this lock the canoes were hauled to upper level. Hence a far vista opened before them; the faint blue finger of Point aux Pins lay floating on the western horizon, beyond that only sun-lit space, and with eager hearts the voyageurs struck out over an inland sea.

For days they coasted under high granite cliffs that rose straight from emerald waters of unknown depths, the coldest water that Campbell had ever felt. The partners had sailed on in the *Otter*, the company's schooner, and cut directly across two hundred miles towards the bay of the Kaministiquia, but it was otherwise with the brigade. Somewhat lightened—the *Otter* having taken part of the burden—they were forced to hug the inhospitable land and only when favourable weather permitted did they make passage from point to point. Be the wind adverse they were forced to lie up on shore, *dégradés* or storm-bound perhaps for days, watching thundering waves that would have crumpled the paper thickness of the canoes, but when the wind blew light and friendly they made sails of blankets and lay at their ease while the high bows swept over the wrinkled surface with a whisper of bubbles along the yellow sides.

By Michipicoten, the Pic, by the Bay of Nipegon, where that icy river debouches from spruce forests of the Height of Land, they journeyed: when night found them they camped; though in this hard country good camping spots were few and not large for so great a number of men: at times they were forced to anchor the canoes, leaving a guard in each, and seek what shelter they might beneath overhanging naked cliffs.

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Sometimes when weather favoured greatly they voyaged far into the night, making a pretence at rest on shelving ledges where fuel was scarce, lounging by the fires in their blanket coats, smoking, telling strange tales of what they had seen, combing out their long black hair and plaiting it again to the accustomed pigtail.

Seven weeks after leaving Montreal, two weeks journey from Ste. Marie, smoke was visible on the horizon in the belly of a great bay, la Baie de Tonnerre, guarded by a long island whose form was that of a sleeping giant : now New Fort was near, they entered a small river flowing quietly from the west, then around the first bend lifted the masts of the *Otter*. Drawing nearer, the shouts of the voyageurs were answered by crowds of men waving their caps in welcome ; these were the permanent staff of New Fort and the great yearly assembly of wintering partners with their bales of precious fur.

The heart of young Campbell leaped when he saw them : here were his future comrades, here opened the gateway to the *pays d'en haut*.

On the evening following, Neil looked about with amazement ; he was seated at a table with several other young men, two of whom had come north with the brigade, the others being clerks from posts in the interior, while at other tables were some sixty persons, very few of whom he had seen before, brown-faced, heavily bearded, and with all the insignia of life in the wilderness. Many of these were wintering partners. He saw Mr. Fraser who with Roderick Mackenzie had come by express canoe, also Mr. Frobisher and M. Chaboillez who had not even noticed him before they sailed on the *Otter* from Ste. Marie.

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This chamber, the great hall of New Fort, was sixty feet long and of proportionate width, solidly built of heavy timber that here grew in abundance, its floors and walls hewn to a remarkable smoothness, the windows of glass and a good size. On the walls hung oil paintings in gilded frames, prominent being a large portrait of Mr. Simon McTavish by a Montreal artist, and those dominant features regarded the gathering with rugged approval.

Here in the wilderness was spread no inconsiderable feast : fresh venison from the thickets of Dog River, trout from the chill depth of Lake Superior, beaver tails in pickle, a delectable dish, pinnated grouse with a flavour like an English pheasant, wild rice from Lac des Pluies, bowls of blueberries—large, sweet, luscious and purple—wild strawberries, the tiny fruit picked by Indian women, great meat pasties in large round platters, vegetables grown on the spot and white bread. For liquor, port, sherry, the wine of Madeira and strong rum from the West Indian islands. Tall tallow candles guttered on the tables, oil-lamps hung in metal frames from the timbered ceiling diffused a yellow light ; there was much laughter ; rounds of Jacobite songs alternated with the chansons of the Canadians, innumerable toasts were honoured and exchanged. Now the spirit of the Lords of the Lakes and Forests had free rein : here were the masters of the wilderness and their hearts beat high : in front of them waited further adventure, and the present joy of feasting and companionship was heightened by the memory of past hardship and peril.

At intervals came the sound of other revelry near by where the *mangeurs de lard* were fraternizing with

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coureurs de bois who had come down from the *pays d'en haut*. These, the true north men, thought but little of the men from Canada, deeming them but amateurs ; they were an inferior breed, they used oars, their camps were dirty and they ate pork, while the north men lived mostly on pemmican brought from the prairie country where the buffalo grazed near the southerly confines of the strong woods. There was a real meat for a real man, pounded, dried in the sun, solidified in hot grease in a distended skin. But to-night all had been served with their *régale* ; with it a loaf of white bread, a pound of butter and a quart of rum. Every distinction was forgotten ; they kissed, they embraced, they sang and revelled, for on the morrow would begin the grim duty of carrying tons of provisions over the long rocky nine-mile portage that led from the quiet reaches of the Kaministiquia to upper waters and the Lac des Pluies.

"Tell me who some of these persons are," said Neil to his neighbour. "I know a few but not many, and had not expected anything like this. How long have you served the company?"

The young man he addressed was a little older than himself, his manner grave for his years ; he had a long, rather thin nose, eyes far apart and high intelligent brow ; it was the face of a student rather than that of a trader, and Neil had noticed his abstemious habit.

"Four years," said he smiling.

"And where?"

The young man, whose name was Daniel Harmon, smiled again. "In several places—in Montreal and Lachine, then at Grand Portage before the dépôt was moved here ; then north to Fort Alexander, and the

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Swan Lake country west of Lake Winnipeg. Observe that table—the man with the red hair.”

“He is easy to observe,” said Neil his eyes widening.

“It is Macdonald Grand ; I followed him on the Saskatchewan when he went to the Rocky Mountains.”

The man in question was a giant with huge and powerful body ; his flaming hair and whiskers, uncut for years, flowed in untended waves to prodigious shoulders. He looked to be one of violent temper, and now after much drinking was talking and gesticulating, ripping out oaths in Gaelic, French and English.

“It is a curious thing,” went on Harmon, “but one cannot swear in the Indian tongue ; they cannot frame an oath, nor would they invoke one of their deities in anger. We are given to despise the savage, but I wonder have we anything to learn from him there. Next to Macdonald is Monsieur Laroque ; he is about to visit the American Mandan Indians on the Missouri river, who bring corn to us on the Assiniboine. You yourself are from Montreal ?”

“Yes, in seven weeks with the brigade : the weather was stormy on Lake Superior.”

“What is the news from Canada ? I have heard nothing since last year.”

Neil told him what he could, and that Mr. McTavish had sent a vessel straight into the bay to compete with the English in their own territory, also that this was reputed to be against the judgment of his partners.

“It sounds like him, but we make no real progress against the English until there is peace between us and the XY. You have seen their establishment ?”

Neil had walked by it that morning not a quarter of a mile away and wondered at what he saw. In the

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previous year, when the Norwesters abandoned Grand Portage farther to the south-west and in American territory, the route that had served all traders to the *pays d'en haut* for many a year past—they hit upon an easier way up the Dog river to the waters of Lac des Pluies ; but this being a trail that any man who chose might take, once its facility was established, the XY had impudently followed and built their own post near by. Here, if on a lesser scale, they held just such jovial meetings with their own partners, as were celebrated by their richer rivals—it was New Fort again to a lesser degree, but administered by Scots of the same indomitable blood with the same purpose in view. Their brigade had also set out from Lachine, but a little earlier to avoid friction in Canada, they had traversed the same route, transacted the same business at Michillimac, and now embarked on the same expeditions to the west.

“Yes, I have seen it and wondered not a little,” said Neil.

“There is our weakness—the enmity between Sir Alexander and Mr. Simon McTavish—but it is for older heads than ours to solve, and troubles me not. As to Canada and the voyageurs I have seen enough ; I prefer the strong woods of the *pays d'en haut*.”

“Is there so much difference ? ”

“You must judge for yourself. A western savage when he is not mad with our high wine, is a man of nobility, unlike the Iroquois whom you have seen lounging in the Place d'Armes in Montreal—but we shall not leave him as we found him, and for your guidance, always remember that in his heart, the savage despises us.”

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"What!" exclaimed Neil startled.

"He will not let you see it, but it is so and he has good reason. At one time the traders were as gods in his eyes—but no longer." He spoke with a sudden bitter feeling, and Neil vastly surprised kept silent: presently he continued: "Picture now what you will find for yourself. On the Saskatchewan where I go from here, there are Englishmen from the Bay, the XY and ourselves; between all there is outward peace, and the establishments close to each other within a musket shot. Our bourgeois, Mr. Shaw—you see him over there with the dark hair and long nose—will ask Mr. Tomison the Englishman to breakfast, and next day the XY will ask Mr. Shaw. On account of the loneliness of life all will aid each other in the case of fire or trouble with the savages, but should Mr. Shaw trade with a native considered by Mr. Tomison to be his, there is the end of friendship. The savage will be seduced by us all with high wine of which ten parts are water, but strong enough for its purpose, and next day being no fool, he sees this for himself. What then can he think of us?"

"Does it lead to bloodshed?"

"It has, and will again, but we are attacked less than the English, whose posts are not so well manned—they are parsimonious in such matters. Listen! Not long ago a free trader in the Eagle Hills, vexed with an Indian's importunity for drink, mixed laudanum with the rum. That cost dearly—there was a massacre—the fury spread against all whites—old Fort Brulé was plundered and at South Branch House all were burned alive save only Mr. Vandriel, who lay concealed in a cellar and escaped in a small canoe.



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These were English posts, for the Indian did not care whom he butchered, and there was but one thing that saved us all—one alone."

"What?"

"The smallpox, it killed in thousands."

"But how? Speak louder, it is hard to hear."

"They had murdered some white man thus afflicted, and worn his clothing; the disease spread like pollen from prairie flowers."

"That is the truth," boomed a deep voice from across the table where an older trader, with tanned face and small bright eyes was leaning forward, his hand to his ear, "I was with Mr. Duncan McGillvray and saw it myself. It began, we learned afterwards, with the Ojibways, the Saulteurs of Ste. Marie, and travelled westward over the Grand Portage. We found it in the Eagle Hills on the Saskatchewan. The tents of the tribes were there, ay, and a stench no man could withstand: there they lay, the poor brutes, hundreds of them, such parts of their bodies as the dogs and wolves had not devoured, with the buffalo skins in a heap, and the few that lived camped half a mile away, starving, too weak to go farther. They told us that their friends when taken with the disease rushed into the river to wash it away and perished the more quickly. The plague went on to the Sioux on the plains, who passed it to the Snakes and Mandans on the Missouri. They in turn gave it to the Piegans and Blackfeet. Ay, 'twas a fearful scourge, but it beat down the hot spirit of the savages. Show them a wee bottle after that, tell them there was smallpox in it, and they would crawl at your feet. We have now but one danger left and that is of our own making."

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"High wine," said young Harmon promptly.

"Ay, high wine. List to the commotion will ye?"

The place had filled with uproar. All told there were that night within the stockade of New Fort not less than a thousand men, of whom most were now enflamed with strong drink: inside and outside the great hall babel reached its height and none more riotous than the masters of this great company. The tables were strewn with broken glass; and on the floor squatted a group chanting *Roulant ma Boule* in tipsy unison; Macdonald of Garth, *Bras Croche*—he of the crooked arm—was roaring a tale of his ancestor, who differing from Noah, built an ark of his own with entire success. No semblance of order remained; a few of the bourgeois were reeling away to where they would find different entertainment with another sex, while roaring groups of voyageurs and northmen, with arms linked, made for the Indian village, whose conical teepees dotted the banks of Dog River. Here high wine had also circulated, the natives were free with their women, and licence prevailed.

Young Neil was dazed: he felt the eyes of Daniel Harmon fixed on him sober and cool as though inviting his impressions, but he could not speak. He gazed at the intoxicated partners—a few hours ago he had aspired to be like these men, to be himself a merchant prince of Montreal and yearly visit the *pays d'en haut* in comfort and state, but now he did not know what to think. Of simple mind, with rigorous upbringing in a Scottish glen, he felt lost: what he had just learned of the savage of the strong woods put these tribes in another light, his theories were shaken, all the joyous anticipation of days when the brigade toiled westward.

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had vanished, and in their place grew a great doubt. He was servant to this company, and obedience must be implicit. What did that involve?

In this quandary he continued to gaze round the great hall, and observed at one table a trader who looked hard in his direction, a small man with reddish hair, pointed nose and tawny beard. The flushed face was unpleasant, drink had not softened it to conviviality, and the small eyes sharpened as they met those of the young clerk.

He made a gesture of summons.

Neil, half rising, turned to Harmon. "Who is it that looks at me so hard—there?"

"That," said Harmon, "is one you will know well later on, but I hope not too well. It is Archie Macdonald, bourgeois at Buffalo Lake. He is your master—go to him."

CHAPTER V

ON BUFFALO LAKE

BUFFALO LAKE had the shape of an irregular arrow-head, with sides some forty miles long indented with many bays: in its waters were pike, pickerel, perch and trout, and in its secluded corners migratory geese and swans found resting-place on the long flight to and from the northern barrens. In the woods roamed moose, red deer and timorous black bears, while tributary streams were the home of mink, otter and beaver.

At the south point of the arrow head, the Northwest Company had established its post near the southern limit of the strong woods, a point well timbered with white birch, alder, cypress and poplar, with the friendly spruce massively green the year round, housing innumerable mottled partridge that were easily killed with a stick. Not far off was the northerly edge of the plains, and from the Horse Indians, Macdonald drew quantities of pemmican, that he sent eastwards towards Canada, to provision the brigades as they traversed the *pays d'en haut*.

The post, cleverly built, stood on a slight eminence in a clearing some hundred yards from the lake: its twelve-foot stockade of horizontal logs one on the other, their edges shaped so as to fit neatly into a deep channel

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cut in each face of vertical timbers spaced evenly apart. This arrangement locked tight the whole of the outer wall. At each corner was a guerite, or watch-tower, above and part of the stockade, projecting sufficiently to command the adjoining ground all round. The entire structure was not less than one hundred feet square, and put together solely with axes.

The one massive gate was six feet wide—its hinges had been forged in Montreal, and opposite stood the store with shelves and counters of unplanned whipsawn spruce loaded with trade goods. Behind stood small cabins; their windows were squares of membrane, the stomach lining of moose or oiled deerskin scraped to paper thinness, admitting a dim light. The roofs were of logs with a heavy ridge pole to carry the weight of winter snow, the log walls chinked with moss and white clay, fire-places of stone, and stout floors of logs hewn on one side. When night came, a tallow dip from animal fat provided what light there was.

Ranged against the stockade were houses of the post *engagés*, that of Bouché the French half-breed interpreter with his wife and daughter, the fur store, provision store, magazine, the meat-house containing pemmican, moose-flesh, salted geese and swans, and a dog enclosure. There was a well, prudently sunk in case of danger when drawing water from the lake, while round the inner face of the stockade ran a platform where one might stand in safety and shoot. For some distance all round the post the land had been cleared, to guard against surprise attack.

One of the houses, the smallest, was Neil's: his bed a moose hide stretched over a stout frame, padded with spruce boughs periodically renewed: he had a

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thumbed Bible given him by his mother on his departure from Scotland, four other books, a hide-bound trunk and a gun. These with some changes of clothing were his possessions.

The situation of the post was favourable in that it lay between two great families of savages, each of whom might come to trade under suitable inducement. To the north were the Athabascans, a branch of the Crees, bush Indians who trapped the more precious furs such as marten, otter and fisher, while to the south lived the Assiniboines, a people wilder and more dangerous. These were the prairie hunters. Mounted on fleet horses, descendants of those brought to Mexico by Spaniards three hundred years previously, it was their delight to pursue the thundering herds over rolling plains that stretched unbroken to the mountains of the west.

Night frost had plastered the wilderness with golden leaves when Neil arrived at Buffalo Lake: here the detachment, divesting itself of Macdonald's outfit, swept on, heading ever west and north in contest against approaching winter that now crept southward from the arctic.

It had been a notable journey from Lac des Pluies. Starting with a hundred and sixty small canoes and nigh a thousand boisterous men, so that the waters they traversed were alive with singing, sweating humanity, the great procession diminished just as Cameron had described. Penetrating farther and farther into the interior, Neil could read for himself the story of the race for fur that had now lasted since the first free traders, men of small resource but great hearts, risked their all in this land of savages: here the North-

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west Company leaped ahead of the outrunners of the Hudson's Bay, there the XY had outstepped them both and planted a post even deeper into the west. Already forts were established in the Rockies and far north towards the naked country of the Eskimo, till now it was the dream of men like Simon Fraser to challenge John Jacob Astor and the Russians on the Pacific.

Neil had seen but little of his bourgeois on the way, being too unimportant yet for recognition, and Macdonald though not yet himself a full wintering partner made a point of cultivating those that were. The young man's imagination was too busy to resent this : their talk at New Fort had been brief, Macdonald surly and overbearing even in drink, and the sight of the post filled the new clerk with interest. As the brigade came in view there gathered a crowd of men, Indians, breeds, women and children : there rose encouraging shouts to the voyageurs who at once plied their paddles with utmost vigour, it being a matter of pride to approach each establishment on the long journey at topmost speed, dashing up with no sign of weariness. Under this urge the canoes leaped forward, splitting the calm water till they pulled up sharp abreast of the fort where a fusillade from long-barrelled rifles and fowling-pieces awoke the echoes of Buffalo Lake. Then, rounding the point and hoisting blanket sails to a favouring east wind, they swept on determined to camp that night thirty miles farther at Methye Portage, and there drifted back the strains of *Roulant ma Boule*.

Macdonald's outfit of ten canoes had dropped out of line : now they came gently to land, the bourgeois stepped ashore to be saluted by all, and immediately began to talk to a young white man whom Neil had

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already noticed. He was very tall, very thin and clean shaven.

"This," said Macdonald pleasantly, "is Mr. Stuart, the gentleman whose place you will take."

Neil put out a hand to be taken in a claw-like grip, and Stuart smiled: he had blue-grey eyes, and so engaging was the smile that Neil already regretted his departure—he felt that he could like this man.

"And this," continued Macdonald, "is Louis Bouché, assistant clerk and interpreter. He will keep you straight when Mr. Stuart has gone."

Bouché made a salute: his eyes were black, his face swarthy, his beard neatly trimmed; he was a short man, deep of chest, light of leg, whose father had been a French free-trader in still earlier days, his mother a half-breed Ojibway of Ste. Marie, thus making him a French quarter-breed who inherited the shrewd honesty and woodland wisdom by which men like himself became the most valuable servants of the company. Twenty years previously he had married a Cree woman from the country farther north.

"All is well here?" asked Macdonald, surveying his isolated kingdom:

Stuart reported that that summer he had taken in trade some ninety hundredweight of pemmican but beyond this nothing much, and the season had been hot. A little debt was given to the Athabascans who promised to bring their early catch after the first snows; one Indian employee had lost his hand through the bursting of a gun; three outfits of the English company had passed through on their way to Lac des Slaves; there was talk of trouble among the Assiniboines to the south, who contemplated an attack

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on the Crees in revenge for some of their women being stolen.

This latter news was unwelcome, and Macdonald, frowning, questioned Bouché who had recently returned from the north branch of the Saskatchewan. These tribal wars, conducted with the utmost savagery, were annoying to the traders : not only did they upset the trapping but also interfered with the supply of pemmican from the plains, and the most important duty of the bourgeois was to collect this staple and send it east.

"Well, we must be on our guard. Mr. Campbell has a letter for you, Mr. Stuart, but first you and he will check in the outfit, when you will proceed in an express canoe and overtake the brigade. Bouché, I do not see your wife and daughter—are they well?"

"M'sieu, quite well."

"They are not here?"

"They have gone to fish at the north end of the lake : perhaps they will get some ducks."

"They return when?"

Bouché lifted his shoulders. "M'sieu, what man can tell what his women will do ; they had not expected you so soon."

He looked a little self-conscious ; his tone had a suggestion of evasion, and Neil intercepted a sly glance from young Stuart, while Macdonald seemed ruffled.

"Let me know when they arrive, I have some small gifts for them. You gentlemen will now attend to your duties, and when the goods are checked in Mr. Campbell will go through the stores' inventory, giving a receipt for it. Mr. Campbell, from that moment you are responsible. Bouché, send my personal luggage to my house."

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The interpreter went off and Stuart turned to Neil :
“ That biggish bundle is six months’ issue of the *Edinburgh Scotsman* from October last ; he will read a copy every day keeping just nine months behind till the next lot come in by dogtrain, but we’ll talk of him later. Let’s get on with our work now.”

Shouting something in Indian, he motioned to the canoes and the servants of the post began to carry the pieces through the great gate, watched by impassive savages to whom this display meant wealth. Strouds, or lengths of woollen cloth, bales of coloured cotton, bundles of muskets, boxes of flint and steel, lead, powder, five-gallon kegs of high wine, sacks of flour and sugar, chests of tea, ice chisels, copper wire for snares, hatchets, Brazil-tobacco in rope-like twists, beads and kettles—all these passed before their wondering eyes. Night fell before the young men finished, and Neil was about to report to the bourgeois when Stuart shook his head.

“ Leave that till to-morrow.”

“ But he told me——”

“ Ay, he did, but to-morrow will do better—come and see for yourself.”

They went out behind the store : all was silent within the stockade, the small log buildings were quiet as the grave, and there could be heard only the distant howl of a dog that bayed the moon : no light was visible save at one window that stood half open. Here Stuart put a finger to his lip and beckoned.

“ Have a peep at Mr. Archie Macdonald, then come with me.”

Neil, standing on tip-toe, peered in : the bourgeois was sprawled limp in a big wooden chair, head on one

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side, eyes shut, mouth loosely open. His arms hung slack, on the table beside him was a metal canister, on the floor at his feet a small metal cup and one copy of the *Edinburgh Scotsman*. The smell of liquor filled the room. Came a whisper in Neil's ear.

"You see why to-morrow will do."

Neil's heart sank; he felt a touch on his shoulder, then they went to the great gate which they found open with Bouché sitting smoking close by. Now it was the duty of one of the clerks to see that this gate was closed every day at sunset and a watch kept.

"Why is this?" demanded Stuart.

"M'sieu heard what I told the bourgeois," said Bouché respectfully, "and there is a reason for it which m'sieu will understand. My woman and Julie will soon be here, and it is well that they enter without sound, for which there is also reason, therefore I take the watch myself and wait for them. M'sieu need not be disturbed, Georges Lapointe will be here before I leave."

Stuart hesitated a moment, then nodded, and the two young men lighting their pipes walked down to the canoe landing. It was some time before he spoke.

"I think it my duty to try and put you in a position to do yours with the least possible discomfort, and it is better to tell you some things at once rather than leave you to discover them for yourself. Have you noticed anything between the bourgeois and Bouché?"

"I thought I did."

"Well, the situation is strained: Mr. Macdonald has, I think, got as far in the company as he has had ability to get. He realizes that. He has been here for some time now without promotion and the real reason

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you have seen to-night. Now I'll tell you more. Had any of the senior partners found him in this condition when on duty in the post that would be the end of it, but he takes care that this does not happen. You saw the carousal in July at New Fort ? ”

“ I did,” said Neil, wondering not a little.

“ And did you notice that in the morning the heads of the partners were clear to go about their business ? ”

Neil nodded: it had impressed him at the time ; even Macdonald Grand was coolly sober twelve hours after his orgy.

“ You see they relish their liquor at the right time and place, but not otherwise, while here in privacy Macdonald drinks a large proportion of the high wine that was meant to unhinge the savages with whom we trade. There is none in authority over him, there are those among the Fort servants who will swear that he drinks not at all. Then there is the matter of women.”

“ Women ? ”

“ Yes ; any bourgeois or clerk is at liberty to take any woman or girl he desires in the neighbouring tribes ; it is considered an honour for the woman and her family. But with our bourgeois the case is different, there is but one girl he desires, that one he cannot have, and with the high wine it works poison in his brain.”

“ Bouché's daughter,” said Neil quickly.

“ Yes.”

“ But you said——”

“ Bouché is a French Canadian of natural ability, and the reason Macdonald will not get Julie is that he will not promise a legal marriage, while her father very wisely frowns on anything else. Bouché is a proud man

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and honest, on whom you may fully depend, and Julie having much white blood is of unusual appearance. You will see her for yourself.

"There is also another point of equal importance. Bouché, through his wife is accepted by the Crees ; has many friends in that tribe ; they trust him, and it is through him that fur comes to us from the north instead of going to the English on the Athabasca who give better prices because their goods cost less to transport from the Bay than do ours from Montreal."

"I had not thought of that," admitted Neil.

"But it is the case ; also Bouché has visited the Sarcees, though they are lazy, shiftless, bring us little of value and come chiefly in hope of high wine. But most important he is well held by the Assiniboines between whom and the Crees there is poor feeling, so you can see that without him this post would do but small trade. That then is the situation with regard to Julie—the bourgeois cannot have his way without taking a risk he is afraid to take, and I have often wondered why Bouché stays here when he could do much better with the Englishmen or the XY. It may be on account of his wife."

The new clerk pondered this situation with mounting misgiving.

"Also," added Stuart dryly, "you are a Campbell."

"But that—does it matter out here?"

"In the long winter it seems to me that everything may matter—even 1692 in the Vale of Glencoe. For yourself I have no fear, but be prepared for unpleasantness and meet it with discretion. Perhaps," he added smiling, "I have said more than I should."

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Neil put out his great bony hand in a crushing grip. "What you have said goes deep and will stay there ; I will do my best. Do you journey far to the west ? "

"It is my ambition to be attached to Mr. Simon Fraser when again he seeks the Pacific ; I have had a scientific training, I can take observations and make maps which may commend my services."

"Mr. Fraser was at New Fort two months ago," said Neil, "though I do not know where he is now, and there was talk in the brigade that he would shortly make another attempt. It was he that instructed me to this post."

Stuart gave his thigh a resounding slap. "Then he has his suspicions—you had no special orders ? "

"None."

"Which means that he has paid you a compliment and depends on your judgment. If he proposes to travel west, he must soon pass this way to winter in the mountains. Listen—do you hear anything ? "

Neil heard nothing but a faint lisp of water on the sandy shore.

"To your left—there—close to us."

As he spoke a small canoe appeared floating like a curled autumn leaf across a shimmering pathway cast by the rising moon ; the paddles were laid across the gunwale, and it drifted, disturbing the mirror of the lake no more than did the long-legged water spiders that skated on its glossy surface. In the stern was a crouching figure, in the bows knelt another, slighter and more erect. With a stroke or two it came nearer, resting against a great log that served as landing-place where no rocks threatened the delicate bark sheathing ; the figure in the stern put out a steadying blade, while the

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one in the bows stepped lightly ashore and steadied in turn.

“*La mère Bouché et sa fille*,” said Stuart softly.

The girl heard him, glanced at them swiftly but did not speak, and lifted out a string of shining fish hung on a forked stick run through their gills that glinted silver in the moonlight. Neil had a glimpse of a smooth oval face and large eyes of sombre beauty; her skin seemed an olive shade; when she picked up the forked stick he noticed her extreme ease and grace of movement, and his pulse gave an unaccustomed beat. How different from the sluts he had seen at Michillimac and New Fort.

Now the two lifted their canoe, setting it gently down well clear of the water, and with no words made for the great gate. A moment later Bouché's low-voiced warning was audible.

“There, Mr. Campbell, goes the real problem of Buffalo Lake post,” said Stuart dryly. “Make of it what you can.”

CHAPTER VI

JULIE

TWO days later the new clerk accompanied Stuart to Methye portage, climbed the last long hill in eleven arduous miles, and got his first view of the Clearwater sliding between heavily wooded slopes towards the north. Sir Alec had come this way when he followed the Mackenzie to its mouth on the Arctic Sea, and again when he reached the Pacific, and here Simon Fraser must pass if he was to realize his great ambition, but apart from the main waterways the country was virgin, peopled by wild tribes continually roving in search of game, savages who had not yet seen a white face, and were feared by the hunters of the western plains.

Such thoughts were in the minds of the two young men who lingered over a last talk, mutually averse from parting.

"I must get over there somehow," said Stuart, pointing towards the Rockies, "but there will be little profit for the company if we do reach the Pacific."

"Why?"

"The cost of carrying goods from Montréal would be too great and we could not compete with the Americans: also the English can land trade stuff there round Cape Horn at small expense, while the same

ship will carry back the fur. You may see something of the English this winter—has Macdonald instructed you ? ”

“ Nothing of my duties as yet, but I talked with other clerks on the way from New Fort.”

“ You will hear from him soon. As to the English you will certainly be ordered to prevent the Indians from trading with them and capture their fur if you can.”

“ Is there no law in this country ? ” objected Neil.

“ Only the law of the strong, and we are stronger in the *pays d'en haut*—that is the first lesson and governs all else. We are in no danger from the English ; their posts are smaller, more weakly manned, their servants not so capable, nor do they know the country like us.”

“ I had thought that I came here to trade not to pillage.”

“ My friend, like the rest of us you came to do what you are bid : you have sold yourself as I did for a hundred pounds for seven years.”

“ Then this is no better than service with the English ? ” asked Neil, thinking of his father.

“ It is better because one has a chance to rise and might some day be a partner. Under the English that could never happen ; you would be at the disposal of men across the Atlantic who have never seen this country, but I think you have come at a good time since before long there must be open war between us and the English. None can tell when or where it will start.”

“ I wish there might be less distance between us,” said Neil regretfully, “ I shall need a friend at Buffalo Lake.”

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Stuart sent him an amused glance : he was so young, so earnest and seemingly dependable ; his size and strength counted for much in a place like this, and already he had attracted favourable comment amongst the wild population of the post. He looked like a man's man. And to one pair of dark expressive eyes he looked something more than that.

" You will not be without a friend," answered Stuart frankly, " and you can trust Bouché. I speak of what I know. He will steal fur at the bidding of the bourgeois, but will not lie to a friend and is ready to be yours. Amongst the savages trust none at all except perhaps one Petaun, who is chief of a tribe some eighty miles to the north. His village is on Cree Lake, and you will meet in the spring time if not before."

Neil nodded, but did not reply : these few days had laid the foundation of something he valued and he felt loath to say good-bye. It seemed that Stuart had a judgment and quiet confidence beyond his years ; he had ambition and knew what he wanted ; probably he had friends among the partners and now most likely would journey far with one of the leading men of the company. There were a thousand things one wanted to ask but there was no time.

The last canoe had been loaded, leaving a vacant place in the middle and now the guide made a gesture of impatience : the sky was grey, the air turning chill. Stuart put out his hand.

" It is already a question whether the Peace River brigade will make Fort Vermillion before the ice takes, so every hour counts. I feel sure that we shall meet again. I wish you well."

Speeding paddles soon carried him out of sight round

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a bend in the Clearwater, which stream would bring him to the greater Athabasca and so to the Peace River and foothills of the Rockies, a country of big timber and mountain sheep.

Neil went slowly back across the portage, heedless of the chatter of his men, and started for Buffalo Lake : the shores along which he passed were thickly wooded, and every breath of wind brought down a rain of leaves yellow and gold that embroidered the quiet water with gay and fantastic pattern. Overhead winged flights of the smaller birds first to embark on the long pilgrimage to sanctuaries far in the south, beaver were at work in the swamps laying up store for frozen months, rabbits already displayed patches of white, and all signs pointed to the approach of winter.

Reaching the post next day at nightfall, he found the bourgeois, clothing loose, in front of a great fire, a glass at his elbow. His face was flushed but he was not drunk.

"Mr. Campbell," he began, "you have not before acted as clerk?"

"No, sir."

Macdonald launched into an exordium on the duties of a clerk : Neil would make himself acquainted with the staff, with the voyageurs and post servants, but must not become intimate with them : at Buffalo Lake there were some thirty of these and their rations were seven pounds of pemmican each a day exclusive of an allowance for their family ; what else they desired they must buy. Neil himself would have two hundredweight of flour, sixty pounds of sugar and twelve of tea each year, also what meat he desired : he would assist in the trading, see to the defences of the fort, do the cor-

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respondence. This list lengthened until it appeared that he would do everything.

"Food—food—food——" suddenly blurted the bourgeois thumping the table, "that is your chief duty. You observed what food was supplied to the voyageurs between here and Montreal?"

"From Montreal to New Fort, peas, corn and pork : from there to Cumberland House wild rice and pemmican ; from thereon only pemmican."

Macdonald looked mollified. "That is right, and a brigade has no time to hunt or fish to feed itself or our goods would never arrive, so from each district is drawn what it can best supply. The most nourishment in the smallest compass. We would not be here to-day did we not get pemmican from the south, and we need twenty hundredweight a week. If it is not brought in, you and Bouché will go for it to begin with, and the second time you go without Bouché to the Saskatchewan, to the Bloods and Piegiens, who have no fur, only pemmican. Our supply of fur lies to the north. Do you know what makes good hunters in a tribe?"

"No, sir."

"High wine." Here the bourgeois fondled his glass.

"Will you not drink with me?"

Neil coloured a little. "I do not take liquor, sir."

"Hah ! Well, perhaps so much the better. I said high wine makes a hunter : for love of it—in the hope of it—the savage will work hard and bring in fur. Once having the taste he desires more—much more. We do not trade in it but give it," he added smoothly, "and a two-gallon keg with twelve gallons of Buffalo Lake water is still strong enough for our purpose. We

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are all the same, ourselves, the XY and the English who began it in the Bay a hundred years ago—and that is all we have in common with the English.”

Refilling his glass, he moistened his lips, stretched his legs and nodded at the fire.

“Mr. Campbell,” he went on, “you and I stand alone here whatever others there may be in the post, and anything you hear that may be of interest to the company or myself you will report to me. I charge you with that. You will permit no familiarity, especially from Bouché. You have talked with him already?”

“I have, sir, a little,” said Neil, more and more uncomfortable.

“He is capable but in some things unreasonable—very. Above all, you must be on the alert for our savage customers of to-day may seek our scalps to-morrow, and only one or two, carrying no arms, are allowed within the post at a time. At the moment I think we are safe since the Crees contemplate raiding the Athabascans and both will come to us for ammunition. It is a matter of women—like most of their tribal wars.”

At this he gave a soft chuckle and sent the young man a glance as though inquiring whether he was interested in the subject, but Neil, confused, made no sign. He knew nothing of women, especially Indian ones, except that for a trifle of cloth, a few beads or a mouthful of rum they gave themselves to any white man who desired them. To him they seemed more animal than human.

“Well,” said Macdonald casually, “with the exception of just one you may take whichever——”

He was interrupted by the report of a gun coming

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from the darkness of the lake and repeated thrice at even intervals : the echoes flung it softly to, and fro, and he jumped to his feet.

"That is the signal of an express courier, hurry !"

They went out quickly : already the sentry had opened the great gates and stood staring, weapon in hand, while Bouché and others pulling on their shirts were running down to the waterside. Now a shout came from the obscurity and towards them rushed a bright yellow canoe manned by six swarthy paddlers, crumpling the smooth surface under its finely modelled bows.

A young white man stepped out, saw the bourgeois and saluted.

"This is Mr. Macdonald ?"

"It is, but you travel late, sir."

"My name is Ferguson : I am head clerk at New Fort and carry a dispatch to be read by all wintering partners and post managers. I have orders to reach the farthest possible western post before the ice makes."

Macdonald, very surprised, welcomed him, bade Neil see that his men were fed, and with the stranger returned to his own house. He called his servant to put food and liquor on the table. "You will refresh yourself ? What is this dispatch ?"

Ferguson handed him a small leather satchel with an open letter inside :

"To all wintering partners and post managers in the *pays d'en haut*. News has been here received of the death of Mr. Simon McTavish in Montreal early in July. It is possible that in the near future we may open friendly negotiations with the XY and Sir Alexander Mackenzie,

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with a view to the final consolidation of our interests, and you are enjoined to avoid any action that might embarrass such procedure, at the same time maintaining our exclusive right to trade with those savages to whom in the past you have given debt. You are further requested to communicate the above to such wintering partners and managers as you may encounter, and in your discretion such officers of the XY as may be in your vicinity.

“Signed. WILLIAM MCGILLVRAY.”

This was dated at New Fort, August the twentieth, and Macdonald read it with absorbed attention ; then he looked up.

“You have travelled fast, sir.”

“Having had the pick of the best paddlemen in five hundred I wasted no time, and a courier has also been sent out by the XY with much the same kind of advice : we came side by side as far as Cumberland House where he turned into the north Saskatchewan river.”

The bourgeois handing back the letter, looked thoughtful.

“This is sudden news : not many of the XY are near here, but their establishments though small, are very active. So in future we combine to fight the English ? ”

“That is Mr. McGillvray’s intention if he and Sir Alec can come to terms.”

“You saw him at New Fort ? ”

“Yes—he arrived after the Montreal brigade, and after him hurried an express with this information. I am told that what most hastened the death of Mr. McTavish was the failure of his trading venture on the

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Bay, for which the company disclaims all responsibility. It cost him not less than forty thousand pounds."

"Well, Mr. McGillyray is the right man to make peace with the XY. Eighteen years ago he came here to Ile a la Cross in the west, racing for fur with his rival, Roderick Mackenzie, cousin to Sir Alec, but 'twas a race between personal friends and the friendship held fast. They spent that winter in camp beside each other, traded with the same savages, and voyaged back to Grand Portage still side by side with good packs and their crews singing together. That is not possible to-day."

"The opinion at New Fort is that it will be so within the year, and Sir Alec is said to be in favour of the alliance, his principal obstacle having been removed. Meantime, such partners as are now wintering in the *pays d'en haut* are invited to send their views either by my return or the first winter express to New Fort with authority to Mr. McGillyray to act for them. Runners will start for Montréal from Lake Superior so soon as these documents are received."

Into Macdonald's cheeks crept a dull flush; he was not a partner, he had no say in this matter, no vote, he was just a pawn to be moved as his superiors saw fit; also he realized that while this amalgamation would work much benefit to the trade it must also disadvantage many such as himself; they would become superfluous because posts, formerly rival, would be abandoned, the number of managers certainly reduced and others degraded—with only the option of leaving the service. Young men would profit, but elders like himself be shelved. Secretly he admitted that he had built up no real claim in this connexion; judging by

Julie

the present outlook his reign was nearly over. He fastened on this thought and it worked like acid in his brain.

"For myself I am glad it is coming," continued Ferguson. "It being a parlous thing for brothers and cousins to have to fight for fur with the savages, and when they are together it will go hard with the English."

"Hard with the English!" That roused another thought in the bourgeois, but he tucked it away for further deliberation and pressed liquor on the traveller.

"Drink, man, and then to bed! No doubt you will be off at daybreak."

"How far from here to the end of the lake?"

"Some thirty miles; then Lake la Loche, a small matter, and Methye Portage which is ten miles and more, with downhill at the end into the Clearwater. That gives you a fine run to the Athabasca."

"We are good for the thirty before making camp," said Ferguson getting up stiffly. "I told my men we should not sleep here."

"You would start at this hour?" Macdonald himself would not have dreamed of it.

"The winter, sir, is coming fast from the north and I must move fast to meet it. I hope to reach the River of the Slaves, where I can get dogs, before the ice makes and proceed to Fort Vermillion; thence to Rocky Mountain House, my journey's end, and return the way I came. It seems I shall have seen something of the *pays d'en haut* before reaching New Fort again."

Macdonald glanced at him enviously: he was young, straight, powerful, with a strong face, a manner of

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complete confidence, and quite unimpressed by the remarkable expedition on which he was engaged. Behind him stood all the power and authority of the Northwest Company.

"The English posts," queried the bourgeois, "do they also get this news?"

"Many have doubtless gathered it from our establishments by this time, and are considering how best they will meet the pressure. Good-bye, sir; I may ask your hospitality perhaps in January."

Macdonald went with him to the water's edge: already the post was buzzing, and Ferguson's crew surrounded by a group of excited guides; they were a picked lot, the strongest and most reliable voyageurs out of the great company of veterans on Lake Superior, their muscles of steel, their spirits bold and high. At sight of Ferguson they took their places; at his nod their paddles dipped, they burst into song and vanished into the night like a dream.

Neil standing with others from the fort watched them go and bit his lip; he felt affronted; like the rest he had heard the news, but not from Macdonald who had not seen fit to send for him during the conversation with the courier, which was pointed considering that the clerk stood second in command. Now the young man left to himself lit his pipe and smoked in moody rebellion till he felt a touch on his arm.

"M'sieu," said Bouché very civilly, "would you not come to my house for an hour and drink tea? My *famille* would be honoured."

At first Neil hesitated, it not being customary for a clerk to accept hospitality from a guide, but to-night he was too lonely to consider ceremony, and Bouché

Julie .

was not the man to presume or forget his station. Also there were few guides in the *pays d'en haut* who could offer tea to their friends, so remembering what Stuart had said about Bouché he accepted.

Entering the house he had an immediate sensation of comfort, and his mood relaxed. Bouché was clever with fingers, drawknife and axe ; the room reflected both skill and taste, and what was usually a bare interior had here been redeemed with home-like little touches. There was a book-shelf, a carved gun-rack, and carved hooks for powder horns ; the log walls were barked and oiled, their chinks filled with white clay, the membrane windows neat and tight. Thick warm buffalo robes lay on the hewn floor, the wooden hand-made chairs fitted the body, the flame of dry pine roots leaped hotly in a big stone fire-place cemented with clay.

On the floor beside the fire squatted the guide's wife, a Cree woman of about forty years of age, now a motionless mound with a red shawl drawn tightly over the head and shoulders ; her copper-coloured face immobile, but a suggestion of grave welcome on her lips. Looking up at Neil she did not rise but bent forward saying nothing, and when he put out his hand murmuring one of his few words of Cree, she took it in a dry wiry grip and stared at him hard.

"Julie," called Bouché, "*viens donc.*"

With a kettle in her hand the girl appeared from a little shed Bouché had built for a summer kitchen : she glanced at the young man, nodding, blushing a little but not speaking, and began setting dishes on the table with a movement graceful and deliberate.

"I am fortunate, m'sieu, in having two cooks in my

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famille," said Bouché, "and both better than your servant Goudreau."

"Goudreau," smiled Neil, "does his best and I do not complain."

"But his hands are too heavy for the cuisine. Will you sit here—my wife, she prefers to stay where she is. Well, Julie, you have heard the news?"

"Yes, it is all through the post."

Her voice was low, husky, with little accent either native or French: she was rather small of stature with a round finely modelled neck and high, firmly moulded breast outlined by a tight cotton blouse; her wrists were small and square, her hands smooth, well shaped and quite unscarred. She had on a short woollen skirt, no stockings, and moccasins of embroidered moosehide. Neil, watching her with sudden and vivid interest, noted the flexible sensitive mouth, the oval face and olive-brown skin. He thought she looked like a faun.

"What does m'sieu think of this sudden news?" asked Bouché.

"Being so short a time with the company I do not know quite what to think."

"For myself and many others it will be much easier," smiled the guide, showing his white teeth. "For instance, there is my brother; he is with the XY on the Saskatchewan: it may be that I meet him on the trail—that has often happened—when we address each other, we salute, he inquires for my *famille* which he knows well—he is a good uncle to Julie here—but when we encounter the savages it is another thing and we watch each other like one dog and one cat. Eh, Julie, is it not so?"

Julie

"Yes," she laughed, "you are just one dog and one cat."

"Julie knows and has seen it for herself: she goes with me sometimes on the trail when she is like a small but very strong man in the woods; she can shoot as well as I do, perhaps even a little better, and speaks the Cree tongue with her relations."

He went on happily, talking with frank pride about his girl as though she was not in the room, with never a word of the silent mother who made a slack crimson pyramid by the fire: she looked like an image with her carved lined face, and her expression revealed the pathetic resignation of all Indian women when once they have said good-bye to youth. But she loved Bouché with a sort of voiceless idolatry.

Now while the guide chattered on, giving a more vivid picture than he realized of the *pays d'en haut* in the past twenty years, rejoicing to have a white man to talk to freely, Neil felt himself under observation, and, turning, gazed straight into the girl's eyes. She was regarding him with a look at once profound and abstracted: she did not smile, but sat watching him as one might follow a wedge of wild geese far overhead and with just such fixed concentration: her eyes were like pools shadowed darkly by over-hanging trees, still as such pools are still, and like them revealing nothing of what lay beneath their unwrinkled surface.

In this strange moment he became more urgently aware of her: he had seen her about the post, by the lakeside and slipping from the forest with a gun over her shoulder, when there had passed between them only a few words, and not till now had the inner man of him been aroused; but this long fixed speechless look that

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suggested an infinity of things did set alight in him a sudden glow that was the response of youth to youth, and he experienced a quick sense of hunger. All in a breath he wanted to take that strong wild body in his arms and feel its warm firm breast against his own.

He did not know how long this intoxication lasted, but when he caught Bouché's eye the guide's lips carried a little smile.

"M'sieu," he said, "I took liberty in asking you to my house, but if you are content I hope you will visit again. M'sieu Stuart sometimes did me this honour. Also," he added significantly, "no other man has my permission to come here."

Neil nodded, trying to talk easily, though his tongue felt stiff: Julie, now smiling, confirmed the invitation, while the crouching woman by the fire turned her gaze towards him; not a word had she uttered, but obviously she understood everything. Neil had a vision of this girl and his bourgeois. Any man would want her.

"*Eh, bien!*" said Bouché rising, "I must now go my round and see that the guards are alert—you will excuse me?" Putting on his capote, he disappeared; there was movement from the hearth, and the Cree woman, gathering the dishes, took them into the kitchen. She did not return, and Neil's breath grew faster till a laugh came from the girl.

"M'sieu is not very comfortable?"

"But I am—indeed I am." He felt the blood climbing to his temples. "This house is much nicer than mine."

"Then we will make yours just the same, but I hope

Julie

you will not be like M'sieu Stuart who hardly spoke to me at all."

"Why was that?"

"I think perhaps he was afraid of women and for me had no tongue, but always talked to my father about things that did not interest me; then they would go out and look at the stars for a long time while he gave them names."

"Don't you know any other white men?"

"But yes, for in the summer they all pass Buffalo Lake on the way from New Fort and the English posts on the Bay; I have seen as many as fifteen in one year."

"So many as that?" he asked soberly.

She nodded, put her elbows on the table, cupped her chin in a pair of smooth brown palms and sent him a straight friendly stare.

"Yes, as many as that, and it is much more easy to talk when we are alone. Next year it may be that my father will take me to New Fort with the fur, and that would be wonderful."

Neil shook his head, remembering only too well what he had seen of the halfbreed women at the great dépôt: also he admitted that there was another reason.

"I think you are better off here."

"But why?"

"Safer," he blurted.

At this her lips wreathed into a smile, and she looked oddly wise.

"M'sieu thinks I am but a child and do not know some things—well—he is wrong. Three times have I been asked by a monsieur to go and live with him as a

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country wife but not marry. One of them in this post has asked me many times, but I do not like that, and they are all so old. The bourgeois here is much too old, and that is saying nothing of many other things." Here she paused with an indescribable gesture. "How old are you?"

"I am twenty-one," stammered Neil.

"And I am nineteen this year——" She put out a hand running her fingers through his reddish thatch. "Why is your hair of that colour?"

"I don't know: why is yours black?"

"All Crees—you see I am some part Cree—have black hair like my mother. You like me—yes?"

She was very close to him now, conveying a sort of wild fragrance from the scented cedar boughs on which she slept: his head began to swim; something signalled a warning with a reminder of what Stuart had told him of just where he stood in this matter, while his body and lonely youthful spirit grew clamorous. It was queer, he reflected, that he should think none the less of her for being so direct and unabashed, then reminded himself that all her days had been spent in contact with savages whose lives were naked and unashamed. This experience had left no mark on her, but rather made her the more compelling to a man like himself.

"Of course," he said a little thickly, "of course, and I like you very much."

"Then you are not afraid of the bourgeois who likes me too much?"

He was about to take her in his arms and show her how little he was afraid when a step sounded outside; she slipped back to her chair and Neil stiffened. Now

Julie

the door was jerked open ; Macdonald stood on the threshold ; his brows were lifted and came together in a frown.

"Where is Bouché ?" he creaked.

"He has gone to the *guerite*, *m'sieu*," said Julie smoothly, "he is with the watchman. Do you want him ?"

Macdonald's small eyes grew hard : he scanned them each in turn, the colour deepening in his cheeks—then a moment of silence.

"Mr. Campbell, come with me : Julie, find your father—tell him to be at my house in a quarter-hour."

"*Oui, m'sieu*, certainly."

Her tone was light, almost gay, and Neil, the more ruffled, followed his master. In the larger house the bourgeois seated himself and pointed to a chair : liquor was on the table, but this time neither did he touch it nor offer any : he was upset by some deep feeling and for a moment said nothing. He bit his lips, glancing at the young man in a baffling fashion, and when he began to speak he seemed to harbour no resentment whatever.

"I have to-day heard by express messenger that Mr. Simon McTavish had died in Montreal."

"So I learned, sir."

"That may mean much, and to-night I will be very frank. For some years I have known that my efforts are but lightly esteemed by the company. They offer me no advancement. At New Fort this summer, though hospitably entertained, I saw that my promotion was not a thing to be expected. Is that clear ?"

Neil, now very uncomfortable, could only nod. He felt shame for the man.

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"It must be," went on Macdonald raggedly, "that I have enemies in high places, and Montreal is a long way off. I do not know who they are, but in spite of my many years' service, they are strong enough to prevent my becoming a partner. Well, Campbell, I am going to surprise those gentlemen, so listen carefully to this."

He recounted briefly what Ferguson had told him, then, leaning forward, his eyes like gimlets, added viciously :

"The fight for trade will have no more softness about it after this : humane and kindly impulse will be out of place. Fix that in your mind. Our posts will increase in strength, while the English remain as they are. The savages will now get one-third less liquor. It will be war, Campbell, war as never before, with quick recognition to those most successful. That is where you and I stand to-night. And the English will be forced to the same conclusion." He took a gulp of neat rum, and choked a little. "You understand me?"

This cold analysis given by a man with drink in his head yet expressed with entire clarity could not be misread, and the young clerk found himself faced with larger questions than had so far come his way. Also he was in a quandary over Macdonald who suspected and hated him—one could not doubt that—yet talked as to one worthy of confidence. The situation was confusing ; Neil wished that some clear-minded friend like Stuart were here to consult, for Stuart's last warning had been to trust none at Buffalo Lake except Bouché. Could that include Bouché's daughter ?

"I think I understand, sir."

Julie

"Very good : now I have a plan to discuss with—ah, Bouché, come in—no, do not stand." He nodded to a chair.

The guide, surprised at this civility, seated himself on its edge, resting brown hands on his knees, regarding his master with bright intelligence.

"M'sieu desires to speak to me?"

"Yes : owing to the news about Mr. McTavish, it will be necessary that you and Mr. Campbell spend much time this winter in travelling, and you will be very little at Buffalo Lake. I desire you to journey among the Crees whom you, Bouché, know very well. At present most of their fur comes to us, but some still reaches the English on Lake Athabasca at Fond du Lac, and that must now cease."

Bouché's dark brows lifted a trifle.

"You have married a Cree and the means lies with you, so with Mr. Campbell you will move amongst them buying their skins at a good price so soon as they are taken : you will make friends with the best of their hunters, using as much liquor as you see fit, and if you use it wisely there will be little fur left worth having when the spring comes. The English may keep that. Also you will travel past the Crees and visit the savages on the Great Slave. I will give Mr. Campbell a letter of authority to replenish your goods and liquor from any of our posts on the way, and such fur as you buy you may leave at the nearest to the credit of this one. It is, of course, understood that you visit only such tribes as trade with the English : you will start so soon as the ice is good, returning here in three months—it may be more—depending on what you find."

"M'sieu desires me to be away for three months?"

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"I desire and command." Macdonald's voice was suddenly hard. "What is three months?"

"But, my family," stammered the guide, "it is a long time: can they not travel with me for the first month, then wait on Lake Athabasca with the people of my wife who winter there? That would be two less mouths to feed here, m'sieu, and the supply of pemmican is not very good this year."

"Your family will be safer here in your own house, and it is not a journey for women: also you will not be welcome in the English districts."

Bouché, fearing what might happen in his own home, felt in a quandary; committed to obey his bourgeois, he perceived very clearly what lay behind this commission.

"You will go," went on Macdonald, "in sharp opposition to the English, not visiting their posts under any circumstance, nor giving, nor taking assistance in that quarter no matter what happens. Also be not too sparing with your liquor, and make what difficulties you can against them amongst the savages. After to-day, Bouché, this company wastes no further time in being polite to its rivals."

The guide, grasping the true significance of this, felt rebellious: never in his life of stress and adventure had he had any aversion from the English; time and again he had been glad of assistance never withheld in hours of danger, for were they not all in the wilderness together, a handful of whites amongst countless natives of unpredictable temper. He did not profess to understand the queer big-boned Orkneymen who formed the majority of the English personnel, and had often been amused at their clumsiness in the strong woods, but experienced for them only a sense of friendly competi-

Julie

tion ; he was too good-natured to harbour anything else, and the thought of inflaming hostility amongst the savages against those whose bread and salt he had eaten filled him with repulsion. And how could he leave Julie without protection ? He glanced at Neil to make out what the young man was thinking, but the face was blank.

“ Well, Bouché,” concluded Macdonald, “ those are your orders, and I would be glad should you also visit the Yellowknives who take fur on the edge of the Barrens. Mr. Campbell, you will be in the first place responsible.”

“ When do we go, sir ? ”

“ I will advise you later, and should anything of importance arise during the winter you will communicate by express runner. You and Bouché will make your own arrangements and submit to me a list of what you propose to take. I wish you well, and it should be an opportunity for advancement with this company. That is all for to-night.”

Neil, thus dismissed, was making for his own quarters when Bouché detained him.

“ M’sieu, will you not return to my house for a little —I must speak to you of this affair. Pray come, m’sieu. You and I are not alone in the matter, and the bourgeois has already forgotten us until to-morrow.”

His tone was so earnest that Neil yielded : the room when they reached it was empty, but as they seated themselves at the fire Julie appeared silently and sat at her father’s feet, her head against his knee. She looked up at him, with wide searching eyes, and he put his hand on the sleek dark hair.

Now came a little silence while Neil regarded these

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two with a sudden profound conviction that they were destined to be for ever linked with his own life in some manner impossible to anticipate. He had come a long way from Argyle to discover them in this corner of the *pays d'en haut*, and in some curious but welcome fashion they seemed to offer the link he so badly needed between past and future. To-day he could not imagine himself ever returning to the old life in the bleakness of a Scottish glen : he was happy when with Bouché, absorbing from the guide the hard-won wisdom of the west, and experienced a throbbing satisfaction when he was near Bouché's daughter : the girl's eyes seemed to draw him on to something strange and inviting, and whatever might now lie ahead he felt assured that he would not have to face it alone.

Presently Bouché began to talk in a tone coloured by simple and natural emotion : " M'sieu, there are but two things in this life that I treasure—my wife and this girl of mine. Let me tell you the story of Louis Bouché, born at Trois Rivières, it is now a little more than forty years ago. Twenty years ago I was a young free-trader and travelling on Lake Athabasca with another Frenchman, one Paul Larue from Montreal ; it was just before springtime came and the ice was bad. It is true we should not have made that crossing at all, but trade was good and we unwilling to turn back. Well, m'sieu, we were in the middle of the lake half-way across when a great rain came and a strong wind rose, and the ice broke up all round us. My companion and the dogs were drowned before my eyes, and I myself plunged into the lake, but, *grâce à Dieu*, I was able to reach the shore and lay there half dead. Then again it became very cold.

Julie

"M'sieu, I had no flint, no steel, no tinder, no weapon ; my clothing was frozen hard like ice itself, and for three day without food or fire I walked in search of some camp. The sun was now bright, and striking up from the snow it made me blind, so I lay down to die knowing I should not wake again. Then in my sleep I heard voices in the Cree language, and it was a family of Crees that found me. M'sieu, they did not know who I was, but put me on a toboggan and took me to their camp and wrapped me in rabbit-skin blankets, and the daughter of that family made herself naked and laid down with me in the blankets, giving me the heat of her body so that I lived. She is now my wife, we were married four years afterwards by a priest on Pine Lake and Julie was then three years old."

"I remember that priest very well," smiled the girl gazing at Neil, "he had a long grey beard and long black cloak, and hair coming out of his ears, and a small gold cross on his breast."

"You are right," nodded Bouché, "it was Père Disette himself all the way from Quebec, and a brave man : he died a few years afterwards when amongst the Mandans on the Missouri River. For myself, I think they killed him since one of them got a gallon of rum for the gold cross. *Alors*, m'sieu, since then I have worked for the XY and this company, and now my Julie is a woman. Life has no secrets from her ; too often has she seen it given and taken, but she is still a virgin, and I have sworn that she shall not become the country wife of any man who desiring only her body will presently leave her here in the *pays d'en haut* with his children when he returns to Montréal or perhaps across the sea to his own people. M'sieu has been to

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New Fort and will understand the reason why I have never taken Julie there or to Grand Portage, for she might not return as she went. But, *naturellement*," he added caressingly, "she thinks I am hard on a young girl who desires to see the world."

"*J'ai un papa formidable, eh, m'sieu?*" She crumpled her red lips, and played with his brown fingers. "He calls me a young woman yet treats me as a child. Papa, when will you learn that I am well able to take care of myself? And next year I am going to New Fort, if not with you then with my mother in our own canoe: it is quite easy, that journey, and with but one trip over the portages we shall arrive first. Then I shall say, 'my father, Louis Bouché, the guide from Buffalo Lake, is on his way, but being an old man travels slowly and I did not wait,' eh, Papa, how do you like that?"

She rallied him, but her eyes had turned to Neil; they were very provocative, the eyes of a graceful creature as completely at home in this forest setting as a tawny deer, yet at the same time she seemed as modern and assured a woman as the young man had ever spoken to, and he responded to an art that he was far from understanding. She appeared in a way wiser than her father; having no fear she was much more confident, and there flashed back to the young clerk what Cameron had said about it being much better in the *pays d'en haut* to return to a native woman at night than to a white one because they had so much more to give. Thinking of this, there flashed between them a lightning signal.

Bouché, if he detected it, gave no sign and his expression was grave.

"M'sieu, it is with a purpose that I have spoken before Julie, for to-night there are two thoughts in the mind of our bourgeois : one he explained, but only one. He desires to advertise himself with the company, but by our efforts ; what we may do of service, for that he will take the credit, but for failure or disaster the blame will be ours. He speaks smoothly because I am married with a Cree, and for that reason the trade with her relations on the Athabasca comes much of it to Buffalo Lake, but if I went from here to the XY or the English that trade would go with me ; for the rest of it he desires Julie as a country wife, but does not wish to make an enemy of me, so it is all very plain, but what does one do in such a case ? Should I refuse to go on this journey I am dismissed and lose my pay, much of which I have not drawn, while if I do go, what of Julie ? "

" Ah, *la pauvre Julie !* " exclaimed the girl teasingly, "*et son pauvre Papa !* She is so frightened of *le vieux bourgeois* — she has no defence — she cannot shoot. When you are far from here he will come probably in the night when she will beg to escape, and cry, then yield and be made the country wife of this old man, and *le pauvre Papa* will return desolate, and by and by have to feed many small children when the bourgeois goes back to Canada. Oh, la la ! and yet it is all very simple."

" But it is not simple," shouted Bouché, both vexed and laughing.

" But it is, Papa : my mother and I will go with you."

He shook his head. " I had thought of that, at any rate so far as the Athabasca where you two could await our return, but the bourgeois would not hear of it,

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and said that this was no journey for women. Myself I think perhaps he was right. Remember, my child, that for years you have lived in such a house as this, and said good-bye to the lodges of the Crees. No, those days are over for you."

He spoke with authority, rubbed a shaving of Spencer's Twist in his hard palm, slowly filled his pipe, lighted it with a brand from the fire and sat emitting volcanic little puffs at clock-like intervals.

But Julie was unimpressed ; evidently she had her own plan in this affair, expected it to be unchanged, and the picture of travelling with her through the north country filled Neil with warm anticipation, so that his thoughts were secret, sweet and intoxicating, and these because they were so new gave him a sense of living as never before. In the past he had felt but little, there being so little to experience in that small grey stone Highland cabin with its black slate roof, and outside the ceaseless chuckle of a stream, and all round the naked mountains pushing back the rest of the world with their streaming flanks. He had been lonely there, but this wild country had a taste in it : its ever-broadening dimensions invited him on and on, his warm blood responded to the girl's nearness, and he sent her a glance no less frank than her own signalling that he felt as she did and their time would come soon.

This seemed to satisfy her : presently giving Bouché's brown cheek an approving pat she slipped away : but for a moment the guide did not stir, till in the manner of one whose thoughts are deep he pressed down the hot ash in his pipe.

"M'sieu will observe that I am not a man to ask questions when they are not desired."

CHAPTER VII

THE SHAME OF IT

ON a day in late September when the rivers were cold and shrunken, Mamanouska, The Fish, conjuror of a band of Chipewyans, sat deep in thought. A man of emaciated countenance and uncommunicative eyes, he was regarded by his fellows as a person of mysterious authority, and in virtue of his calling they believed him to hold converse with the powers that ruled their lives. A familiar of the spirits of wind, sky and storm, he could summon them for advice when he chose ; he had no women, no children, and lived by himself, and where Mamanouska abode no other might enter uninvited.

Sitting at the open door of his teepee, his eyes roved to other lodges from which rose a thin trail of pearl-grey smoke ; a pack of gaunt dogs patrolled the shore in search of dead fish ; a group of half-naked children had snared a partridge alive and were pulling off its legs and wings with screams of laughter, licking their blood-stained fingers ; the ruddy carcass of a moose lay on a wooden platform ten feet above ground, while chattering women had stretched its hide on a great frame and now scraped it with sharp-edged stones ; strings of drying fish were suspended tail up from a skeleton of horizontal poles. All this he saw and much

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else that was customary, but it suggested nothing to his wondering thoughts.

To him now came Petaun, The Otter, chief of the band, a warrior of prowess against the Assiniboinés and Piegans. Petaun was a great hunter, tall and straight as a young poplar; the snows of sixty winters had not dimmed the dark fire of his commanding eyes, and a large hooked nose projected dominantly from his strong, deeply lined face: like the conjurer, he was dressed in skins and had a robe of buffalo-hide cured to whiteness flung over his shoulder. He seated himself beside the older man on the bank of the dwindled stream, and for some time neither spoke.

"The season moves quickly, Mamanouska, the snows are not far off, and it is in my mind that we start soon for Buffalo Lake. My young men are growing restless for the taste of strong waters. There is little fur to trade, but we can make debt, and if they say no we shall try the English. Is it well?"

Mamanouska inclined a grizzled head; he gave no sign of pleasure at being consulted in this fashion, but privately was glad of it. Up to recent years his position had stood unquestioned, nor might any matter of importance be settled till his approval was announced after consultation with the upper powers, but of late and since the white men had established themselves in the Athabasca country and southward where the great plains were dark with buffalo, he had been less secure; white magic, he felt now convinced, was stronger than his own, and the days must be at hand when he would no longer be approached in this manner, so it was only left to him to be politic, to appear to guide his people without undue risk of opposing what he saw

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to be inevitable, just, as this move was inevitable, and by his conduct fortify his status as much as possible.

Like others of his kind, he did in actuality possess a prophetic power of which the band had had many proofs. He himself understood this not at all, but the fact remained : he could go off alone into the woods for a few days, exposed to the weather, eating nothing, disciplining his gaunt body, communing with things of the forest, with fur and feather, till there came over him a strange and thrilling consciousness that he was in touch with the unseen. That was one way of doing it—though not the most dramatic—then he would return with a gaze mysterious and compelling and be himself amazed at the assurance with which he spoke of things yet to come. And long ere this he had decided that when death approached he would journey by himself and meet it in lonely silence in some secret corner where none would ever find him. He would vanish from amongst his people. Such would be the fitting passing for a conjuror, and in due time he would prophesy that also.

Now he turned a mesmeric eye on Petaun.

“If there be made for me that which I need and of which you know, I will tell you,” said he in a thin, reedy voice.

Petaun, who perhaps also perceived that his authority was on the wane, summoned his young men, gave an order and instantly they became busy, darting into the woods, where there rose the sound of many axes, and whence they began to carry on their shoulders stout straight posts some nine feet long which they sharpened at one end. Digging a circular trench six

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feet in diameter, they inserted the posts, touching each other, sloping inwards, then refilled and pounded the earth so that the wooden wall now stood solid, making a stiff blunt enclosure six feet high that yielded not to the pressure of the strongest man. There was left a small opening through which one might pass, over it was laid a skin for a door-flap, and enclosing the top was stretched a buffalo hide laced tight. Here was the Medicine House, the source of many wonders.

This took some time, during which Mamanouska had retired to his own teepee, and now returned, his face hidden in a frightful mask, his hair freshly greased : he wore the ceremonial robes of a conjuror worked with their strange insignia, and carried a small drum with a medicine bag decorated by the scalps of fallen enemies. Entering the cage, he drew the flap and was alone with the spirits.

The tribe waited breathless : children were dragged into lodges and silenced, a hush fell over the village, only the sigh of autumnal wind was audible in the poplar tops, till presently they heard as from a distance a thin chant, slow at first, sounding above the muted voice of the drum. It mingled with the soft wash of the river, with the rustle of innumerable dry leaves among the poplars. What Mamanouska chanted they did not know ; it was in no familiar tongue, but not yet had his hold on his people so loosened that they did not yield to mysterious fears : thus for centuries past had the will of the spirits been made clear to the wild children of the west, and their fearful hearts still responded to the unknown.

The drum-beat swelled and quickened, the voice rose with it, the note gradually sharpening to a violent

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crescendo. Mamanouska was far from them now, conversing with Beings that none but himself might meet and survive : he argued, pleaded, cajoled and commanded ; he was a man possessed. Something was liberated within that blunt-ended cage, and with terrified eyes they saw its strong walls tremble though none amongst them could have made it quiver ; the tight skin roof was throbbing like the exposed heart of a dying beast when the blood pumps through ; power was there such as had always stirred and filled the tribes with awe. Truly this conjuror was a great man.

Now the chant slowed, the drum-beat softened to a hollow rumble like distant muttering thunder, then it died altogether, and the tribe waited breathless.

The door-flap lifted : Mamanouska came out and stood before them all in the full light of the sun, a man weak and shaken from spiritual encounter. He had taken off the mask, his eyes, large and full of wonder, looked through and not at them, his face glistened with sweat and he made a sign to Petaun.

"I am told," he said in a voice of great weariness, "that you will make trade at Buffalo Lake, but there are some who go that will not return."

"What men are those ?" asked Petaun dubiously.

"I was not told any more ; I have spoken."

Petaun felt a little troubled over this : secretly he did not desire to believe it, but the mystic legacy of the past could not be entirely obliterated, then he decided that since there were forty adult warriors in his village it seemed unlikely that he himself would be in danger. What he did not reveal to Mamanouska was that he as well as the young men desired the taste of drink. Many precious things had the whites

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brought, but of all their stores nothing else was so craved by the first inhabitants of the interior as the potent stuff in those small iron-bound casks : it ran through their veins like fire, it roused in them passions beyond any measure, it made them dream dreams, feel like their own gods and act like devils unchained.

As to any other profit to be gained by this journey Petaun had his doubts. The fur taken in full summer was with the exception of beaver worth little in trade, and the Englishmen at any rate against its being trapped, so the warm months were occupied in fishing, hunting, building canoes and voyaging the surrounding net-work of waters to select favourable spots for winter encampment ; also the summer was the best season for tribal wars since one left no tracks on a river. But with the exception of a few young women stolen by his warriors from the Yellowknives in the north, Petaun had of late been inactive in this respect. He was a man of solitary nature, entertaining no love for any human being save one, his younger brother, Pinné, the Partridge.

At his word the village was dismantled by the women, the warriors disdaining all such manual work, rolls of bark and skin were stripped from the lodge poles, leaving greasy blackened patches under the naked frames that all through the *pays d'en haut* marked where these wandering tribes had once rested, and here the gaunt dogs sniffed and searched. Canoes were turned over by the men and repatched with strips of fresh bark and gum melted by blowing through two hot brands held close to the paper-thin fabric. The fur of mink and marten, pulled inside out over the small warm carcasses as a man might strip his shirt, had been dried

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by drawing it tightly over forms of thin wood like small paddle-blades shaped for the purpose, fur side still inside. Beaver and bear pelts, these had been stretched on stout frames, crackled as they were rolled up. In the centre of each canoe were children, babies packed tight in moss-filled bags and lashed to wooden frames, pots, kettles, axes and nets, bundles of pelts, rolls of bark, lumps of moose meat. Kneeling in the bows the mother, in the stern, gun ready within reach, the master of the lodge. From the women during this moving came a constant shrill chatter, while the men stood stolidly idle with eyes that missed nothing, for should knife, axe or powder horn be now forgotten it would shortly be buried for the next seven months.

When all was ready Petaun stepped into his canoe, paddles dipped and the flotilla moved off in complete silence. The Indian had no *chanson à l'aviron*, he was too occupied to sing, his trained sight roved the lonely shores along which the dogs now leaped from rock to rock or flitted phantomlike between slender trunks in the naked bush. This voiceless never-ceasing scrutiny revealed countless things that the white man of equally clear vision would have missed, for instinct was here at work; a stroke or two of the paddle till again it trailed in the brown water, and again a photographic stare of the forest that registered all it covered.

Their passage had no formation, no order; it was casual; time did not exist for these nomads of the strong woods; where they might rest there was home, and like floating leaves the patched fragile craft spread out over darkling waters. Thus had they ever journeyed.

Travelling by intricate channels known only to them-

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selves, they made camp a week later a quarter-mile from the palisade at Buffalo Lake, and Macdonald regarded the visitation with scant approval. He knew its purpose, also that there could be but little fur of real value at this time of year, but the tribe had come to him rather than to the English post not far distant, and this was no time to be captious.

Petaun, as was the custom, made first his official and unaccompanied visit to the bourgeois; when received by Macdonald he was conducted to the store, and its stuffed shelves yielded what the childish heart of this son of the forest greatly desired. There was a blue coat of rough cloth lined with bright red baize, its flapping tails trimmed with coarse orris lace, and regimental cuffs on the awkward sleeves; there was a brass-buttoned waistcoat and baize breeches, with a shirt of white calico carrying large black spots, the shirt being the Manitou of the smallpox, their sure protection against the dreaded scourge that had wiped out thousands in the days of their fathers. His long, straight, sharp-boned shanks were encased one in a blue stocking and one in a red, with worsted garters twisted tightly below the knee; about his neck folded a large red handkerchief, and crowning the long greasy scalp-lock a three-cornered hat from which sprang a triple plume of ostrich feather in gay and varied colours. Finally about his middle a wide woven woollen sash.

Thus bedizened and the first formality discharged, he stalked back filled with pride to the new camp where the women had already erected a semi-circle of pointed lodges and lit the fires. In the midst stood his own, largest of all, its floors strewn with cedar branches, and here seated, his flaunting plumage outrivalling that of

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a tropic bird and flouting the nakedness of its setting, he waited in silence.

It was for Macdonald, who had not so far left the stockade, to complete the ritual.

"Mr. Campbell," he said when the lodges were up, "you will take two gallons of high wine, adding twelve of water, and go without arms to the headman with Bouché, and give him the liquor as testimony of our good-will. Impress on him that our goods are of better quality and cheaper than with the English. Petaun speaks no English, but you will say it first, when Bouché will repeat it in Chipewyan. You will then be asked to smoke, and will touch the calumet to your lips, taking one draw, but no more, and passing it on. You will make no inquiry about fur or display any interest in anything you may see, then return here."

That evening Neil opened his career as a trader: the lodge of Petaun was crowded with warriors, the strong effluvium of their bodies assailed his nostrils, their beady eyes did not swerve from two iron-bound wooden casks that lay as yet untouched. The lodge door had been folded open, a ring of motionless men squatted outside, and the sun's slanting rays gilded the bronze of their deeply carved faces.

Petaun lit the calumet of peace, its thin rectangular bowl of dark green soapstone, its thick wooden stem carved with symbols, stained with herbal juices, and blew a whiff of smoke towards each cardinal point to signify the completeness of friendship, then handed the pipe to his visitors who in turn repeated the ceremony and passed it on to the circle of warriors. When the sacred thing returned, Petaun gave it back to Mamanouska in whose keeping it remained, inclined his fine

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head that seemed no less imposing with its outrageous topping, and began to speak. He had the gift of oratory ; his tones, deep and melodious, blended with the voice of the surrounding forest, and his grave gestures needed no interpretation.

" You told me last year to bring my people here, and I have come a long way with them to trade. You are rich, but we are poor. Last winter was hard and many of us are hungry, therefore take pity on us now. We want good tobacco wherein are no small worms, and guns that will not freeze in the winter or blow out our eyes. Give us good powder for our hunters, and flints that make the spark every time, and cloth for our women. Do this and we will not trade with the English whose house is not far from here. I have spoken."

It was the old time-honoured speech heard for many a year by Bouché, but now for the first occasion by Neil who regarded Petaun with interest while the guide made his glib reply. He remembered what young Harmon had said at New Fort, and was moved with pity for this wild popinjay in such clownish garb.

There, reflected the young man, sat the representative of a doomed race, doomed by the white man's weapons in their hands, his liquor in their blood, his diseases in their veins. Throughout the *pays d'en haut* its first inhabitants were exterminating each other. The Crees of the north, armed first by the Hudson's Bay and the Canadians, were pressing down from the bush country to wipe out old scores with the Indians of the great prairies, who, mounted on Mexican horses from the south, had had the mastery till gunpowder brought the warring tribes level. The river of trade had run red with blood, wars were not yet over, and

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the hunters fell like autumn leaves. Crees and Assiniboines fought with Piegans and Blackfeet, to whom the traders looked for pemmican, staple food of the west, each lashing their prisoners to stakes that the women might inflict nameless tortures, prolonging agony to the utmost ere welcome death arrived. Still rang the war-whoop through the strong woods and where buffalo darkened the western plain : in recurrent cycles small-pox took its dreadful toll, and even to Neil's eyes the days of plenty were numbered when presently would be left only an emasculated remnant over whom the bearded traders quarrelled for their furry spoil.

With the acrid taste of the calumet on his lips the young clerk thought of himself and what might lie ahead for him in this strange country. Was his life to be spent in taking advantage of savages?

That seemed to have been the point in Harmon's mind, while in other talks at New Fort it became clear that Harmon devoutly believed in God and was deeply troubled because his duties so often clashed with what he took to be the laws of God. God's rules, he had argued, did not coincide with those of a successful trader. And where, wondered Neil, was Harmon now.

Since those remembered days on Lake Superior, and excepting the all-too-short hours spent with Stuart to whom he had taken so great a fancy, Bouché was the only man Neil had really talked with, and it did not take long to take the measure of that brave simple-hearted Frenchman to whom it seemed the present was enough without probing too deeply into the future. Bouché had the buoyant optimism of his race. As for the bourgeois, Macdonald was not a man with whom one could ever be happy. And that left only Julie.

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Now Bouché was finishing his reply with a manner of great goodwill : he told Petaun that the Canadians were the only real friends of the Indians, the only traders that really understood them ; their goods were the best and cheapest, this liquor given in token of amity and affection much the strongest. Petaun for his own sake would be wise not to trust the English since they were all liars who took much and gave little. In conclusion he indicated the two casks of watered high wine : there he said was something to make glad the hearts of the chief and his hunters.

Petaun nodded slowly : he was not in any way impressed by what he heard, having been told precisely the opposite by the English factor when last he visited the post on Lake Athabasca, also he was shrewd enough to realize that thus oscillating between two rival establishments gave him some hold on both, and had already decided to trade elsewhere than at Buffalo Lake so soon as more fur had been trapped : so eyeing the kegs with mounting anticipation he made a sign to indicate that the interview was now closed.

Half-way to the fort Bouché halted. "M'sieu does not look happy."

"Why do you say that?"

"I can see that he is lonely, and can understand why he is like this. In other forts of the company the bourgeois will share his table with the clerks and be friendly ; in the evening they will play écarté or chess or piquette and read the papers of six months ago, but ours is not like that. It was the same while M'sieu Stuart remained here, but he was too busy making observations of the moon and stars to care. There is something, however, that m'sieu might do for himself."

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"What is that?"

"To learn French and Cree would be of much use in making trade."

"Ay, 'twould be of use, but who would teach me?"

"Julie speaks both tongues, and for her too the evenings are long. She has told me that she will be very glad."

Neil pictured himself sitting by Bouché's fire with the girl beside him, no longer lonely; his blood stirred at the thought, and his hunger deepened for one of his own years to share his youth. Prudence whispered that such a meeting would have but one end, but that he now argued was part of a future that might well take care of itself, for Bouché must know what he was talking about, and no doubt the guide had been thinking of the time when he, a young man, felt his half-dead body slowly revived by that of the now wrinkled woman who sat shawl over head for wordless hours on the floor of his log house. Her body must then have been sleek and smooth and warm like Julie's. Did she even, wondered Neil, remember that to-day, for one could tell nothing from the lined mask of her face.

"Bouché, what would have happened if you had saved money enough to return to Trois Rivières?"

"Such things do not happen to me," smiled the guide.

"But if they did?"

"Then I should go with much pleasure."

"Not alone?"

"*Mais non*, but with Julie."

"And her mother—you do not mind if I ask this?"

Bouché shook his head. "M'sieu does not understand. She would not be content outside the *pays d'en*

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haut and she would not be happy. Her blood is not tame, and, I tell you this in private, she still has the desire for liquor. I would leave her with her own people, having made sure she would never hunger, for you cannot take a wild thing of the woods and plant it again in *Trois Rivières*."

"But Julie?"

"That as one can see for himself is different."

They were now reaching the fort and by mutual consent halted, there being more to be said as man to man, so they mounted the timbered *guerite* that looked out over Buffalo Lake and towards the camp of Petaun. The night had advanced to a clear luminous darkness that held a sort of transparency and began to be overhung by a sprinkled canopy of lonely stars: no wind stirred, and while the two waited, exchanging many thoughts, there began to sound in the clustered lodges of the Chipewyans a clamorous confusion; it increased as they stood listening, its turbulence broken by calls and shouts of mounting harshness.

"Petaun is following the road of friendship," said Neil bitterly, "listen to that."

Bouché's broad shoulders went up in a characteristic shrug, but he did not answer, and through the dusk one could see pin-pointed flames of red camp-fires leaping up when fresh fuel was cast on, while round them were now reeling processions of wild swaying figures of men and women in a rocking crazy dance. From the *guerite* they looked small, like terrible and strangely garbed children in a savage play, and at times this delirium was stabbed by the scream of a woman or electrified by that most horrible sound of all, the thrice-repeated war-whoop with its piercing note, a sound

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that chilled the blood all through the *pays d'en haut*. Its counterpart was the pack-call of the grey wolf.

This frenzy, fearsome as it was, seemed in a formidable way to be unauthentic and unreal, coming as it did from the breasts of those who so lately had been men of austere dignity, till it appeared that Petaun and his warriors, with their ancient pride dissolved by the poison of the whites had wandered across the boundary of some demoniac hinterland close by, their essential nature violated and undone.

The transformation sickened Neil's heart, banishing all other reflections, and he made a gesture of revolt, but Bouché remained unmoved.

"M'sieu," he said quietly, "it is true that we keep the devil in those casks of ours and set him loose when it suits our purpose, but all over the *pays d'en haut* you will find this, and I am told that in *Afrique* and other foreign countries where white men do trade it is the same, so we are no better or worse than other people elsewhere. The liquor will not last long, and by to-morrow this will be done with."

"Perhaps, but it is a fearful way to treat honest folk," countered Neil, "and I have heard how honest they are."

"Yes, I have seen a man and his wife on Lac des Pluies entrusted with three pieces of goods, a fortune to the savage, and ordered to deliver them at the Fort Ile a la Crosse, and that, m'sieu, as you remember, is six weeks' journey. *Alors*, they will start by themselves in a small canoe, they will travel and be seen perhaps by none that know them for that time, it will be easy for them to disappear to some other part of the interior, but in six weeks those pieces will be carried in at the

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great gate of the fort, for which will be paid it may be five skins in trade."

"And these, Bouché, are the people we debauch."

"Yes, m'sieu, these are the people, but let me tell you more. We may think we are at any rate safe from them, but we are never safe and nothing that walks is safe. The Jesuit *pères* died in pain and torture at the stake, and I myself have seen a living man without eyes, without fingers, and on his belly a map: the eyes had been plucked out, the fingers cut off joint after joint, and the map was drawn on his flesh with a gun-barrel heated to whiteness."

Neil, struck to silence, was fumbling for a reply, when a yell, a shriek and a bubbling cry charged the air with horror. He made for the guerite ladder with an exclamation:

"In the name of God let us stop it! Murder is afoot there!"

"No—no!" Bouché's powerful grip took him by the shoulder. "That is no place for us—we stay inside with the gates shut. Yes, perhaps someone is killed, but to-morrow no drink will be left, so in hope of more they come to trade: m'sieu must not leave the fort to-night."

"And you—you like this life?" demanded the young man chokily.

"I left Canada when I was no longer than a paddle, and for one such as myself it is as good as any other. Who shall choose his own life?"

"But Julie? Is it the one for her?"

"M'sieu knows what I desire for Julie."

"Then, Bouché, let me be candid with you—these lessons that you and she offer—I would not do her harm, but I have my natural passion, so what if I

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should learn more than languages and she too? I ask this now that you may be prepared. Don't you see, Bouché? I desire her and can't help it."

He blurted this out, face reddening, but the guide only gave a lighthearted laugh.

"M'sieu is not the first. In my own youth I did not ask the advice of those with more age than myself, and now that my years are advancing I do not give it. But I will say this. Between French and Indian, between *L'Ecossais* and Indian, the blood mixes well, while between English and Indian it does not mix. And the rest—*bien*—let us leave that to Julie."

Dawn broadened slowly over the camp of Petaun: women crouched in the lodges over small fires talking in low tones, warming their hands and misshapen bodies, glancing round at immobile infants on flat cradles balanced against the lodge walls—they had minute round faces in which the unwinking eyes shone like bright black onyx. On the brushwood floor men lay in a stupor: outside prowled half-famished dogs with pointed ears and coarse ragged hair bristling along their spines as they snarled over fishes' heads or the entrails of a rabbit. In one teepee with no fire, there sprawled the body of a man with his skull split open. There was a sharp tang of wood smoke, and over the waters of Buffalo Lake, now warmer than the air, drifted wraiths of white vapour gradually dissolving in a strengthening sun.

Petaun roused himself with a groan: he had hazy memories of the previous night and his head hurt; he seemed to recollect fighting, fighting over nothing, but with one whom he did not know; now it appeared

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strange that he should have fought with one of his own people. He argued, however, that it was not his fault, but of the white men ; this conviction grew in his brain, giving birth to mounting resentment, and feeling the need of counsel, he decided to discuss the matter with Mamanouska. When he went out, his woman drew her shawl over her head and did not speak.

The camp seemed strangely quiet, and Mamanouska, whose lodge stood at a little distance as became that of a conjuror, gave no welcome when the chief entered. He too was sitting by his fire, his face expressionless, occupied with a situation that absorbed every thought, so he waited till Petaun spoke.

"There was fighting amongst my people last night, Mamanouska, but I do not remember it. Tell me, you whose head was clear because you drink nothing."

"It is true, there was fighting." The conjuror's eyes remained fastened on the fire.

"Was any man hurt?"

"One man."

"Who was that?"

"Pinné, your brother."

"Pinné!" The chief's voice was hollow, and he rose quickly. "Then I go to see him."

"Pinné will not see you nor any one more. He is dead."

Petaun swayed where he stood ; a surge of blood seemed to pass over his eyes, and the hair on his head prickled. Pinné. His brother ! The one man he loved ! So many years he had hunted and fought beside Pinné against the Piegans and Sarcees ! Then sudden rage took and shook him and left him trembling.

"Who has done this thing?" he croaked.

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"It was the axe of a brother in the hand of a brother," replied Mamanouska in his thin reedy tone.

For a moment nothing happened ; Petaun made no sound and stood as though carved in basalt.

"I told you that some should come to Buffalo Lake that would not return, but it was not told to me who that should be," continued the conjuror in a voice of fate, "and it is plain that not you but the poison of the white men has done this thing."

Petaun, feeling himself for ever abased by this one act, burst into a great cry, the wail of a tortured soul that pierced through the camp, and to lodges where hunters still lying prone, fighting off their orgy, heard and understood. That a man should be thus killed was nothing new : it often happened when the traders gave fire-water from their potent casks, but that one should kill his brother was a thing to be remembered.

Now, slowly, with the chief beside him, the conjuror walked to Pinné's teepee, lifted the door and the two gazed at what lay silent, watched over by a shrouded woman.

Petaun turned away to his own lodge, and in a solitude that none might disturb sat for hour after hour, eating and speaking not at all. Before him lay his medicine bag containing precious talismans that he had from the English on the Bay. They were kept in separate tiny deer-skin sacks : a lump or two of white sugar, four coffee beans, a few cloves, an ounce of tea, a pinch of allspice that gave off a faint odour unlike anything known in the forest, and a small dry fragment of ginger : all these had been bought for high prices in fur with the white man's assurance that such sacred things would make him safe against evil spirits, sickness

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and enemies, and so far they had worked well. Folded tight were some paper prints from England, wood cuts of love-scenes and uniformed soldiers, and these he believed gave him power over women and victory in battle. The collection was the most precious thing he owned, but it had not diverted the slaughter of his own brother. He sat there, baffled, helpless, while in him stirred the first blind working of revenge.

But Mamanouska had more to say in the matter : all through the hours of night he too had sat thinking and smoking till now it began to appear that in this bloodshed lay his own opportunity. He hated the white man with an ancient undying hatred ; doing no trapping himself, such work being beneath his dignity, he did no trade ; he desired nothing that lay on Macdonald's shelves. He was an ascetic, a man apart who neither fought nor killed, having moved far beyond that, and void of all passions but one, this being to fortify his own position in the eyes of the tribe. And the disciplining of his body had given him a clarity of understanding far above that of the rest of his people. He worked only with his brain. Now he went alone to the chief.

"Petaun," he said in a tone that carried deep conviction, "again it is not you that have done this thing, but the poison of the whites. Were there no such poison Pinné would not be dead."

Petaun snatched at his gun, but Mamanouska put out a restraining hand.

"There is first much to be arranged, and now is not the time : I will talk to the spirits, those who spoke the truth before, and they will say what must be done ; till then let there be no word of it save between you

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and me. The others will go to the fort and trade, also saying nothing of this, but go not yourself, for it is in my mind that the name of Petaun will be remembered by his tribe if you and I are only wise."

So argued the conjuror weighing his words, noting every shade of expression in the other man's face, aware that his people were weak and the white men strong, but counting on that art of simulation with which the folk of the *pays d'en haut* were so endowed. Time meant nothing to Mamanouska, he could afford to wait, and there was indeed much to be thought of.

That morning they laid Pinné on a platform built across the branches of a tree, high up so that the wolf might not reach it. His face had been painted, he was wrapped in his best robes, his loaded gun and a skinning-knife rested by the slack arm, and the scalps he had taken in battle were sewn to the fringe of his buffalo shroud. With him lay a bag of pemmican, some corn from the Mandan country, a small kettle, flint and steel, so that he might not hunger on the long journey to the setting sun, while his pipe and a foot of Spencer's Twist assured him solace by the way. So the forest received its pagan child, and over him drifted a few white flakes, harbingers of approaching winter.

All this was known in the fort where, except on Neil, it left little impression, while the young clerk felt sick at heart, and sick to realize that he alone thought anything of it. Macdonald did not speak of it save for a cynical remark that trade should not suffer, nor did Bouché consider it of any real importance, as Pinné had not been a successful hunter. The accuracy of this view was confirmed when that afternoon the men of the tribe appeared in pairs, unarmed, at the great gate,

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carrying such fur as they had of beaver, marten, mink and otter. Most of it was poor fur trapped out of season, short, thin, with little natural oil; lacking a fine velvety undercoat that comes with the frost. Mink and marten had little glossiness, and the beaver was yellowish instead of a deep strong brown.

Macdonald examined it without interest : he would trade if only to keep it from the hands of the English, though to trap in this fashion meant a scarcity of prime stuff later on when forest creatures wore their winter covering, so he instructed Neil to pay but half the standard price in goods, and returned to his own house after a swift scrutiny of his dark-faced visitors.

Bouché, lighting his pipe, looked at the growing piles and shrugged.

"M'sieu," he said, "we laughed at the English for demanding that fur be brought perhaps six weeks' journey to salt water, but were they not right since such a voyage occupies the savage the whole summer and he does little trapping either going or coming? Is it not we ourselves who dealing thus will soon make it that there is no fur at all left for anyone?"

Now after a deliberate inspection of what the store contained, trading began, and for their pelts the hunters received tokens known as skins, small wooden slabs, each certifying trade value to the amount of one beaver, there being no money or coinage circulating in the interior. They waited motionless, and Neil, with memories of the fur house in Montreal, ran his fingers through the soft hair estimating its condition, while Bouché sat on a keg ready to interpret when needed. He seemed amused.

Prices for goods ran high in this far section of the

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pays d'en haut even when fur was not prime : it took fourteen skins to buy a gun—a cheap flint-lock affair made in Birmingham, one for a pound of powder or four pounds of shot or sixteen flints, a blanket cost seven skins, a brass kettle two. For two skins a hunter might choose a check shirt, a pair of yarn stockings, or a pound of glass beads, while a pistol cost him seven. For one he might decide between three fire steels, an ice chisel, a pound of thread or tobacco, or a dozen needles, and for such stuff as was bought to-day the terms were stiffer still.

A grave business this, that took much time but little speech : some of the hunters were followed by their women, and all stood voiceless, dark eyes roaming over shelves laden with wealth beyond imagining, while the pelts, counted and graded, gave out a sharp odour of smoke and rancid animal oil mingling with that of savage bodies. The women spoke not at all, but sometimes tugged at their masters' clothing pointing to rolls of brightly coloured cotton or bundles of orris lace, and with each purchase the hunter passed back the equivalent in skins. At times the wild eyes fixed on Neil asking whether this was really all the white man proposed to give, but no protest was made ; what these men actually felt remained unreadable in graven features where now that the fury of drink had passed there reappeared the native calm of the forest dweller. Pinné's stiffening corpse swayed in its tree-top home, but neither by sign nor word was this referred to, and Bouché, the man who knew them best, grew secretly ill at ease.

It was late when trading ceased, the last hunter departed, and Macdonald surveying the pile of fur

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expressed himself as ill-satisfied, but he had kept Petaun from the English house, and that for the time must serve. When he went back to his customary evening tippie, Neil breathed more easily and looked at the guide.

"So ends my first day of real trading, Bouché; are they all like this?"

"They are all the same, but more interesting when the fur is better. You have observed that Petaun himself did not come, also that no words were spoken even by the women?"

"Yes, why was that?"

"I asked myself why. Petaun has told them not to speak—something moves in their minds that has to do with the dead man, and I would like to know more. I am not very comfortable in this business."

"If Petaun blames us for that, isn't he right?"

"The blood of his brother is on his hands: had it been that of another man it would be different, but the savage who kills a brother considers himself forever cursed. It is important to know more, so I shall send my woman to find out; it may be they will talk to one of their own blood."

"Why should not I go too?" asked the young man, hit by remorse.

"M'sieu might not return. Believe me, when a savage hides himself as now does Petaun, he has many strange thoughts and it is not well to disturb him, so my woman will talk to other women. It is better so. And, m'sieu, to change your own thoughts, which I can see are not happy, will you not put aside this affair and be instructed to-night in French? Julie is ready."

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE AND HATE

IT was like home in Bouché's cabin : a kettle sang on an iron arm that overhung the hearth where flaming birch cast dancing shadows on log walls and the roof of cedar logs ; these were hollow logs, split into long half-cylinders and laid overlapping from the stout ridge piece, so that neither snow nor rain could work through. Bouché had been in the room when Neil entered, then excused himself saying that he would take his woman as far as the camp of Petaun and the young man was left with a sharp feeling of anticipation. Presently there came a soft little laugh and he saw Julie.

To-night she had on moccasins of deer-skin tanned to whiteness, worked with a pattern of stained porcupine quills, a short yellow skirt and blouse made of stuff that Bouché had brought her from Grand Portage ; her arms were bare to the smooth shoulder, and about her neck a string of glass beads with the hue of blood, glowing with living fire against the smooth throat ; her shining hair, not straight like her mother's, but rippling as a wind-kissed river, was loosed from its customary massive braids and hung to her waist, her eyes sparkled and she stood for a moment very erect and supple, perfectly aware of the impression she had created.

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Neil, his heart in unaccustomed tumult, only understood part of what this occasion meant to her : it was the first time that she had been allowed to receive a man alone—hitherto Bouché had always forbidden it—and for to-night she had studied her toilet and rehearsed her entrance. She knew that she could make this man love as she longed to be loved, but she had schooled herself—she must not rush to his arms, it must not be so easy for him as that, and her French blood whispered that this, the first of what she intended should be many such meetings, demanded a certain art on her side. The woman in her was alive and eager for conquest, but with no little dignity she welcomed her visitor, installing him in one of the big axe-hewn chairs that Bouché fashioned in his spare time. Over its frame was stretched a moose hide that yielded to the body like a hammock.

“*Alors, m’sieu,*” she said trying to look serious, “you come for the lesson, you know no French at all?”

“But very little that I got in Montreal,” he answered gravely, but his eyes were bright.

“Then how shall we begin, for never before have I taught anyone like this? Shall I say something in French and you say it after me?”

“Yes, do.”

“*M’sieu vous êtes bien venu.*”

“*Bien venu*, what’s that?” he repeated.

“*Bien arrivé*—you are well arrived. There was M’sieu Stuart for two years, but he was so silent and you will not be like that. *Moi meme j’étais trop seule*—say that—it means I was too *seule*—too lonely. When the snow comes we shall put on *racquettes* and shoot together, and I will show you my traps and *ça sera joli*

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—gay that. It will be very nice, eh? ” Her dignity was now thawing like snow crystals in the sun ; she became very gay and Neil's pulse grew faster. Then

“ Will m'sieu teach me in return? ”

“ What? ” he asked curtly.

“ To write in English—I can read but not write except with the Indian signs.”

“ I've heard of them,” said he, “ tell me.”

She took a charred stick from the floor, stripped a yellow tissue sheet from a roll of birch bark with which Bouché repaired his canoe and laid it on the floor, weighting it flat with small lumps of the lead from which Bouché cast his rifle bullets. Bending her dark head she set to work.

What Neil saw was a line of symbols, angles and triangles with dots placed at various points ; they were very plain to the eye and drawn with firmness of touch in a strong black line. Making them she would pause, look up with a provocative expression and bend her head again while the strong slim fingers moved slowly forward. At the end of the line she put her head on one side and laughed. “ M'sieu cannot read that.”

“ Can anyone read it? ” he countered.

“ Those with my blood find it easy : it can be read from the great bay to the mountains of the west, and always it will mean the same thing.”

“ And what is that? ”

“ You must not know—yet.”

“ When? ” said he nervously, guessing at the truth of it. “ I'll teach you something in English, give me the stick.”

For answer she gazed at him with a strange expression : her lips began to tremble, all her gay confidence

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slipped away and sudden tears filled her eyes. She covered her face.

Neil took a quick breath ; so strange a revulsion from happiness to grief changed his mood and he felt instantly sorry for her. There had been no mistaking her first intention, but now no provocative challenge was left, and he saw only a slender slip of a girl, hungry for companionship in the wilderness.

"Julie," he stammered, not daring to touch her, "what is the matter—tell me."

The slim shoulders grew more quiet but she did not speak.

"Julie, tell me, can I do anything. Can I help?"

She looked at him, eyes large, soft and shadowed, and made a queer little sound ; she dabbed her cheek with a cotton handkerchief pulled from her breast ; she seemed very uncertain but managed a faint smile.

"Would you understand if I told you ? I am very foolish."

"I'd try," he assured her earnestly. "I think I'd understand."

"Then it is like this—to-night is the first time, the very first time that a monsieur has treated me as you have : always since I was fourteen years old it was different, and I saw in their faces something else and it frightened me. Sometimes I would hide myself when the brigade came from Grand Portage till the messieurs had gone, and sometimes they would go to my father and ask for me, offering money, but always he said no. In marriage yes, but not anything else. But you—you are different—with you I am not afraid but ver' happy, and these tears are tears of happiness. Do you understand all this ?"

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Neil gave a jerky nod ; he was greatly moved, desire passed over him, and there came in its place something deeper and not less welcome to his own lonely spirit ; but he remained sensible that though desire was still for the moment it yet lived within him.

" I do understand," he said gently.

At this she smiled brightly, nodded and wrinkled her dusky brows, while of a sudden her quick thoughts changed like the wind.

" There is no one else than me—no girl perhaps in Canada you think of ? " she demanded.

" No one at all, Julie, no one at all : I was in Canada only two months sorting fur that perhaps came from Buffalo Lake, nor did I ever expect to see this place and did not even know where it was. Now would you learn some English writing ? "

" *Plus tard*—that means not yet—nor did you know that there was such a girl as Julie, eh ? And before you came to Canada, tell me about that."

With an odd sensation of being a much-travelled man he began to talk of Scotland, of misty shores, mountains and corries, of his home in Argyle where there were no Indians, no trapping and hardly any trees, of long-horned, short-bodied Highland cattle, of the voyage from Glasgow to Bristol and Bristol to Montreal, of his father, now long with the English on the Bay, whom he had not seen for fifteen years and would not know if he did see him, of his sister to whom he was now composing a letter that would go when the winter express came through from Fort Vermillion to Canada. He showed her the little silver St. Andrew's Cross with his name and the date of his birth that he wore round his neck, the last gift from his mother. It did

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him good to unburden himself for the first time since he left home ; unconsciously he painted a living picture, for there stirred in him an emotion both sweet and unsettling, while the girl listened absorbed, her expanding intelligence visioning that other world of which she had dreamed so often and knew so little. It was there that some day he must take her.

An hour passed and she felt content, learning all the while to love him the more, sitting with her eyes fixed on this man who had given her a new respect for herself : she gauged the power of his big strong body, the muscular column of his neck, the golden smear on his upper lip, and the steel-grey eyes that softened and became blue as he unsealed memories of what now seemed so far away and long ago.

Presently he became self-conscious and stopped. " I talk too much," he said flushing.

" There is more ? "

" Yes, a lot more."

" Then let us keep it for the next time ; there cannot be too much and it is so new to me. Now m'sieu will eat—it is all ready—no, sit there, I will do it."

She set food on the table ; a loaf, nearly white, made with pounded corn from the country of the Mandans, shreds of pemmican seasoned with wild onions and herbs, a jar of wild strawberries and syrup, sugar of the hard maple that Bouché had brought from Lac des Pluies, roast partridge, beaver tails sweet to the tooth, and strong black Souchong tea. There were cups and plates of real china, carried to Buffalo Lake over many a stony portage, and not since he left New Fort had the young man seen such a feast.

She sat opposite him, the young smooth-faced mistress

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of it all, very happy and proud of her housekeeping, her eyes dancing as she noted the surprise in his, for this was her hour, all hers, and she watched him eat, not touching food herself till he made her. She had, too, many visions of nights just like this when presently she would not be left alone, and the same thought must also have been with him when he looked at her with grave understanding.

"You are not hungry, Julie?"

"My head is full of too many things—you like this?"

"It is wonderful and I had not expected to find such a table outside of Canada: you are a fine cook."

He felt for his pipe and moved to the hearth for a brand: she rose quickly to get it for him, together they stooped and their shoulders touched. The contact was electrical; they turned to each other and in a breath their mutual resolution was shattered: he saw her eyes, large and very tender. In the next moment she was in his embrace, her cheek against his.

"Julie, Julie, I love you."

Pliant arms drew him closer—he had not dreamed that a woman's arms could be so strong—the warmth of her young body reached his own, his head swam, swift intoxication swept over him.

"Julie, do you hear? I love you."

For answer she laid her mouth to his in a hungry caress that drew the very essence of life to their lips; she hung there like sweet ripe fruit ready to be plucked, and he was lifting her as he would a child, when there grated behind him a harsh voice.

"Mr. Campbell, I was not aware that this is how you spend your evenings."

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At the door stood Macdonald : he had been drinking, though not enough to make him too drunk for speech or action, and hostility distorted his flushed face as with astonishing quickness he lurched forward and struck his clerk in the mouth. Neil stiffened, and what then happened came very quickly, for Julie suddenly transformed to fury snatched a knife from the table and lunged with all her force ; 'twas like a flash, but even at that not quite swift enough, for Neil's arm shot out and took her by the wrist. The knife clattered down, for an instant she stood rigid, staring wildly at them both, then sinking to the floor covered her face and began to sob.

Now a silence while Neil glowered at the bourgeois' mottled features, he himself having become calm, even cold : he could have broken this man between his hands, though that were a mad thing, but Macdonald had struck him, and for a bourgeois to strike his junior officer was a grave offence. So far Macdonald had the worst of it, and with the blood deserting his cheeks, appeared to realise this. Growing uncertain, he glanced from the young man to the girl crouching slack between them, then back to Neil whose lips were compressed : finally he crooked a finger of summons and walked out.

Neil followed, wordless, to his house, where seating himself he left his clerk standing : there was liquor on the table but he did not touch it.

"Well, Mr. Campbell," he began aggressively, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then you are possessed of more sense than I imagined."

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"Having broken no rule of the company what is there for me to say?"

"There are obligations to your bourgeois not covered by any rules," snarled the other man. "I instruct you not again to enter Bouché's house."

"Is it not then Bouché's house?" Neil's tone was frigid, but he felt a prickling of the skin, his great fingers were curving stiffly.

Macdonald, hating this youth with his urgent strength and composure, controlled himself with an effort.

"Like every other in this establishment that house is under my command, as is every soul within the stockade. Also you will have no further association with Bouché's daughter. You hear my order?"

It was out now: he had taken his position, registered his claim and could not withdraw; for one passing instant he regretted this, but was driven on by a desire that must soon destroy him were it not satisfied. Then, to his fury, Neil smiled, and no answer could have been more provocative; the smile announced that to the girl he was distasteful, that he had made a fool of himself, that he would never achieve his purpose and her gifts go elsewhere, so the effect was to rob him of what little control he had left; he turned pale and there burst from him what had pricked in his soul since first he learned at New Fort that this youth had been ordered to Buffalo Lake. Life and service in the *pays d'en haut* had not yielded what he hoped, though secretly he knew that the hope was unjustified; what efforts he made went unrewarded, no partnership lay in prospect, and he was growing old. Month after month he had brooded over this so that it turned his mind backwards, and he spent many of his sober days in thinking

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about Scotland where his family had lived under the shadow of Meall Mor in the valley where the Coe bubbles down to Loch Leven. Now a long-nurtured venom found vent and his acrid nature seized another excuse for hostility.

"It is not the first time that a Campbell has lodged under the roof of a Macdonald and betrayed the trust," he rasped in a thin ragged voice.

"I have betrayed no trust," blurted Neil.

"It is not so long since the Campbells stabbed in the back those whose bread they had broken," shrilled the bourgeois unheeding, "and once a Campbell always a Campbell. I marked you from the day I first saw you at New Fort but said nothing, thinking perhaps you were not like the rest. Now——"

He broke off, trembling, reduced to so unnerved a condition that Neil almost felt sorry for him; it was not good to see an officer of the company in such condition; physical hunger for one woman alone had doubtless unsexed him, so the young clerk spoke fairly, soothing his own hot blood.

"That business of Glencoe was over a hundred years ago, and the Campbells, who carried the King's arms and were under orders, had nothing against the Macdonalds or any other clan. They did, sir, but what they were bid, and who shall say that they relished the job."

"Bidden by Dalrymple, Master of Stair—the Lowlander, by the Fox of Breadalbane, cateran and trader, by Argyle—chief of all the Campbells! They could trust no blood but their own for deeds so foul, and blood does not change."

Neil, flushing, stood stiffly—what had he to do with

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all this? From a child he had heard talk of Glencoe and that dread winter night, but it meant little. As for the Macdonalds, he had met a few in Montreal but as friends and there had been no word of this ancient affair, so it appeared that the bourgeois must have gone mad, and it behoved one to keep one's own mouth shut at whatever cost.

"There was old MacIan hurrying across the moors with his oath of submission and only a day or two late, but that was all the Campbells needed," chanted the other man in a voice unnaturally pitched, "so they ate his salt for a month; then killed him : they drank our brew, then stripped naked the Lady of Glencoe, tearing off her rings with their teeth : they pistolled women and children all on the word of a Campbell," he raved, "and made a butcher's shop of the Vale. The curse of Cain is on you all. Now keep your hands from the girl I will soon marry."

"Marry," stammered Neil, "you will marry her !"

"Before a witness in the custom of the country, for here I take what I will, what woman I want. You may find some other for yourself."

Neil shook his head like a great dog. Bouché did not see the thing in that light, also the young man remembered what was said about trade coming from the Crees to Buffalo Lake because the guide had taken a Cree to wife, and that if he should leave the Fort the trade would follow him : but knowing Bouché's quick temper, it would be better if possible to keep him out of this dispute.

"Sir," he answered, holding his voice quietly level, "I am within my rights and this girl is not for you."

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"I might have known it," hissed Macdonald, "by God! you have had her already."

At this a pink mist seemed to gather before Neil's eyes: he gave a sudden sharp gasp, then strode forward, took the man by the shoulders and began violently to shake him so that his head flung slackly back and forth as though on a boneless neck, his teeth chattered, he became limp, helpless, dislocated, reduced to a bag of loose bones; then he was flung against the wall where he leaned with arms outstretched for support, his mouth droolling, raving foul unspeakable things.

The young man, regarding him with disgust turned away, and in that moment the bourgeois' hand touched something, the stock of a pistol loaded and primed in its rack, ready for instant use in case of Indian attack. The touch made his nerves tingle and for a fraction of time steadied his jumping pulse. Snatching the weapon, he fired point blank.

Instinct must have flashed a warning, or perhaps it was the click of a lifting hammer that saved the clerk's life for he hurled himself to one side, but not swiftly enough to escape a bullet that tore through the skin of his upper right arm. The roar half-stunned him; he felt a streak like the kiss of hot iron, and, wheeling, saw Macdonald's distorted features through a reek of smoke. They stood thus staring at each other with no words till the pistol clattered on the floor and the bourgeois began to sob hysterically.

Now the door burst open and Bouché plunged in:

"*Mon Dieu!* Is anyone——"

At sight of Macdonald and the still smoking pistol he stopped, eyes rounded: turning, he gazed at Neil who

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only pointed at a small hole breast-high in the log wall ; blood trickled down his arm and began to drip in bright red gout.

"It was an accident—accident," yelled Macdonald, "I did not shoot—it went off of itself."

Bouché looked at the slow stream that now made a widening little patch, and again at Neil. The young man shrugged.

"Yes, it was an accident," he said quietly : "the bourgeois was showing me when it happened and I am not really hurt, it is not deep. This is not the fault of anyone."

The guide shot him a swift glance of complete understanding ; he picked up the pistol, examined it closely and put it again on the rack while Macdonald watched in a sort of daze.

"*Alors, m'sieu* : let us stop the bleeding *tout de suite*. Come with me."

Morning dawned on a different bourgeois : he looked subdued, shaken, exhausted, his face patched and pasty, but there was no liquor on his breath : his manner had a laborious politeness with no apparent remembrance of the affair of a few hours ago, his chief concern being apparently over the disappearance of Petaun and his people.

The tribe had vanished during the night which was a strange thing, for travel in darkness was shunned by all savages except when on the warpath. There had been no noise, no scrape of canoes or muffled dip of paddles. Between the camp and fort stretched a narrow patch of brushwood, and screened by this they went as they came leaving only their spindling lodge-poles to mark where the camp had stood.

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Bouché's woman had returned to the fort, baffled, without gleaning anything save that Petaun, since discovering whom he had killed, had spoken to none except the conjuror and shut himself all day in his teepee where he composed and chanted a death-song for his brother, extolling the slain man's virtues, his bravery in battle, his skill as a hunter, and promising that he should not make the long long journey alone. That was all. Mamanouska had retired to solitary contemplation, the rest of the tribe were sullen, even the women could not be persuaded to talk, and the fact that Bouché's wife was herself a Cree availed nothing in this instance. She had moved over, they said, to the side of the whites and they trusted her no longer.

The days passed so smoothly that Neil began to feel happier, and other Indians came in to trade though not in any number. Now he saw Julie when he wished, but she seemed anxious and distraught, so for the moment passion slept and there was no more love-making, nor did Bouché make any further hints. As to Macdonald, it seemed that some poison had worked out of his blood, his manner changed, he looked and acted quite normally, and not since Neil's arrival had he been so affable. They had long evening after evening together playing écarté while the young man studied his chief's face and wondered what really moved behind those small narrow-set eyes. On such evenings Macdonald talked and talked well : he knew the Blackfeet, for whom he had a great respect, calling them the aristocrats of all savages, and had traded with the Mandans whose filth and brutality he despised. So friendly was now his manner, and with never a reference to Julie, that even Bouché was disarmed.

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The air had become more chill ; there fell a sprinkling of vagrant snow and after a few windless nights Buffalo Lake lay sealed under a sheet of glass : birch, poplar and alder had long since shed their foliage, their interwoven filigree branches making fairy patterns against the grey skies, while green clumps of spruce and hemlock grouped in islets of shelter and warmth amongst the ranks of naked trunks : rabbits had turned white, observable only by the pinkness of their eyes, and the thin covering of snow bore myriad imprints of small delicate forest feet.

When ice had thickened, the fort servants set nets under it, chopping a row of holes twenty feet apart, pushing a submerged pole that carried a rope from one hole to the next : the rope was attached to the net which thus extended its full length of two hundred feet, then led back over the surface to the first hole and made fast to the tail of the net : it formed a great loop, half rope half net, half above the ice, half under. When it was pulled round and emptied, the fish flopped for a moment like curving silver segments before they stiffened to rigid bars.

This first winter of Neil's in the new world brought with it a new satisfaction and happiness, and when Julie took him round her traplines he marvelled at her art and what she told him about animals : on these occasions they were very happy together ; he admired her easy tireless grace on the trail while she laughed at the clumsy strength he exhibited. Macdonald knew all about these excursions, and did not seem to care, but over them both began to close the shadow of approaching separation.

Macdonald was a puzzle : in the evenings he would

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talk and talk well, fingering the cards instead of dealing, and finding pleasure in exploring what was no mean brain. When clear of liquor it was retentive, and he had read whatever came his way : what he lacked in himself was action and sequence, and though aware of the right thing to be done, rightly by himself, a physical indolence led him to depute it to others. At the same time, and without realizing that he was taking exception to the faults of his own nature, he was very critical, especially of the English.

"They were always asleep at the edge of salt water," he jeered. "Radisson, the Frenchman, opened the interior to them over a century ago and they did nothing : had he been supported there would be no Montreal company to-day. Then the lad Kelsey—
younger than you are—only eighteen years old, Campbell, when he reached the Athabasca from the Bay, he came back to tell them about that paradise for fur and they laughed at him. Then Captain Knight and the search for gold—did you ever hear of that business ?"

"I have not, sir."

"'Twas before the South Sea Bubble burst that some-one spread tales of gold in North America, and the H.B. folk decided to gather it in, so Captain Knight, being then seventy years old sailed north from Churchill with two ships and fifty men and fifty casks to hold the treasure. But he never came back, and Mr. Samuel Hearne, also in the company's service found their bones only three hundred miles away and buried them. And after Radisson and young Kelsey there was Hendry who reached the slopes of the mountains of New Caledonia, a still newer virgin fur country, and Hearne himself who made contact with the savages of the

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barren lands. But nothing came of all these labours and the British slept on. No—no—it took the Scots of Montreal to waken them.”

He talked thus with obvious satisfaction, for in truth he himself had had some hand in the process, while Neil only nodded, wishing that he had been posted to that other Macdonald of Garth or M. Charles Chaboillez.

“Mr. Campbell, you are about to make what should be a notable journey for a young man new to the country. The weather is now favourable so you and Bouché will start the day after to-morrow.”

“Yes, sir, we are quite ready.”

“But before you leave I should be glad to know that all is well between us. I speak frankly. Not long ago I acted under impulse and did a regrettable thing.”

“That is of the past, sir,” said Neil, liking the man better for his candour, “and I have put it out of my thoughts.”

“Which is much to your credit, though it stays in mine. I will do what I can for you with the company—” here he paused, giving the young clerk a shrewd look, “but your advancement must turn on the degree to which you can aid in defeating our rivals, so always remember that. Use them when you encounter them, as you certainly will, but be careful they do not use you for there is only one thing to be considered which is fur—prime fur—at a minimum of expense. The courtesies of life have now no place in the interior.”

“I will try to remember that.”

“As for Bouché, you are under his guidance but that is all, and you are the master, so be not too

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influenced by what he says if it conflicts with your own judgment."

"And my route, sir?"

"To the north some few days journey then across the height of land, when you will go eastward towards Reindeer Lake, thence approaching Nelson House north of the Churchill River. Avoiding the customary trail, I suggest that later you make your way to Ile a la Crosse, and you will observe that most of this journey will be in territory claimed by the English. So much the better. At Ile a la Crosse," here sounded a dry chuckle, "you will find another Macdonald, the one of Garth."

"I will do my best, sir."

That was all and they went back to écarté, playing till Neil's eyes were red. When he said good night, by natural impulse he put out his hand, got a firm grip in return and went to his own house full of resolutions.

They started with three traineaux, eighteen dogs and six post Indians, Bouché animated, talking at top speed, spirits high and seeming to have set aside his anxiety for Julie. The Indians were silent: all wore capotes with thick woollen tunics, red sashes bound tightly, mittens hung from a sling round their necks, stout cloth leggings and moccasins of heavy moose-hide. The toboggans carried each four hundredweight of liquor and trade stuff: for shelter there were two shed tents, single pièces of canvas to be stretched between poles; with these a sack of pemmican for use only when fresh meat and fish might fail.

A fine morning with vapour climbing from the water where men were lifting the nets. The air tingled, the

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sun shone clear, from the snow were reflected a multitude of tiny crystal facets so that Buffalo Lake seemed sprinkled with diamond dust, a man's breath spouted from his lungs in a fog; and every inhalation of frigid atmosphere excited a sort of healthy riot in his blood.

With Julie there was only a brief good-bye : during the past few days she had grown unaccountably elusive and remote, staying always with her mother and asking no questions of Bouché. She had made no protest at being left, and Neil, afraid to come to the house, hardly saw her at all ; she seemed to have slipped away, slipped back, merging indistinguishably with other forest dwellers whose present home was within the great stockade, and in a way he was almost glad of this. He still loved and wanted her deeply, but what had previously looked like enforced banishment had in a way sweetened into a signal for liberation, and he was invited to prove himself against other men in a land where only strong ones might survive.

At last the Indians struck along the winding shore to break trail up the long arm that led to the north ; the dogs thrust tawny shoulders into leather-bound collars, the forty-foot double traces tightened like a bow string, and snow crumpled under the curving fronts of the toboggans. The expedition was in being.

As he rounded the first bend Neil looked back at the brown palisade with its snow-plastered guerite, at the great gate and pencils of pale smoke rising vertically into the bright still air : the place looked warm, comfortable and very human in its wild setting, the habitation of those who daring much in the *pays d'en haut* asked little in return. He could not see Julie or her mother in the little group that stood watching, but

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made out the figure of Macdonald; when the bourgeois lifted his arm in salute while Neil waved his tuque.

There was nothing in that hour to suggest that never again would he behold this man or the fort on Buffalo Lake.

CHAPTER IX

WHERE THE FUR WENT

IT was raining in London when Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk, stepped out of his carriage and entered the warehouse in Fenchurch Street where the Hudson's Bay company was holding an auction sale of fur; a well-set man of about thirty-six, quietly though fashionably dressed, his expression thoughtful, his manner preoccupied. To-day he had not come to buy fur but to take the opportunity of meeting several gentlemen he knew would be present, and broach to them a matter now uppermost in his mind.

Entering the hall which was warmed by a great fire of sea-coal, he found an assembly much interested in the proceedings, and a number of persons very fashionably dressed inspecting piles of skins laid out on long tables, frequently touching their noses with scented kerchiefs, while other men of plainer clothing and shrewder manner made a much closer examination, pushing fingers through the silky texture of innumerable pelts, gauging the strength and thickness of the underlying hide. From this they were able to estimate the season of trapping. Some were English, others German and French buyers representing furrier firms across the Channel. The air confined under a low ceiling had a strong smoky smell of animal oil.

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Lord Selkirk glanced at the pyramids of skins : some of them were Macnabs, and had come by perilous routes six thousand miles from the traps of Cree and Chipewyan, bringing an odour of romance oddly stimulating to the idea now dominating his mind.

This young nobleman was an unconscious Imperialist : his great Scottish estates had been harried in the wars of the Jacobites, a multitude of peasant farms were reverting to grazing and deer forests, and he felt keenly responsible for his Highland tenants. To aid them he had founded settlements on Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the weight of that colony hung heavy about his neck. Selkirk in truth had dreamed a great dream that occupied him to the exclusion of all else, and constantly pitched his thoughts to the great areas west of Canada still unpeopled : he was one of the few who had visioned what those areas might mean, and to-day, surveying the fur, he alone of this gathering realized what a story the tawny pelts might tell.

Nodding to several men he knew, he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Well, my lord, safely returned from the Canadas?"

Turning, he saw Sir James Lake, third baronet of Edmonton and Governor of the company.

"There was no danger," he smiled, "and I found much of interest, though not getting as far west as I should have liked."

"And all is well with your island scheme—what is it called—and expatriated crofters?"

"It is called Prince Edward Island and I am pleased to say that it prospers : the soil is good, the climate

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much more temperate than on the great Bay and I have no fears for the future."

"Also, since I am told it yields no fur, well out of the track of the Canadians, on which you are to be congratulated. What occupies you now?"

"My book on the subject of emigration," said Selkirk, "it will shortly be published."

"And no doubt much worth the reading. You were, of course, in Montreal?"

"Yes, where I found great hospitality, dined with the Beaver Club and met amongst others Mr. Astor of New York who spends much of his time there."

"Ah! We begin to hear a good deal of that gentleman. Your impressions would be interesting."

"And you are likely to hear more. He is a shrewd man, sir, and I take it a man of vision: I think he would welcome some alliance with your rivals, for he has great plans on the Pacific coast, but from what I gathered they were diffident." Selkirk made a gesture at the tables. "Your returns are satisfactory?"

The baronet, assuming an air of dejection, shook his head, but a cylindrical figure, full ruddy cheeks and appearance of being exceedingly well fed spoiled the assumption.

"The reverse of satisfactory and I don't understand it at all. We send our factors all they ask for, and naturally must leave the rest to them. They need only to trade goods for fur; they are well housed, provisioned, their spare time is their own in a fine if perhaps rather rigorous climate with excellent opportunity for sport. But all we get over here is a lesser return in a lower grade of fur, with continued complaints about the lawlessness of the Canadians."

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"Had there occurred to you the advisability of buying them out?" asked the younger man suavely.

Sir James, bristling, gave a snort. "No, sir, it had not. We have no desire to pay a large sum for what are our own legal rights. These Scottish Canadians are poachers, damned poachers and trespassers, and this company does not deal with their kind; they think to drive us to the wall by their excesses, but are blind to the fact that in the long run our resources are infinitely greater than their own. At the same time," here he paused for breath and continued in a softer voice, "I must admit that Sir Alexander Mackenzie has rather impressed me. I had rather expected that having lived amongst savages for so long he would have lacked certain social qualifications, but confess that that is not in any way noticeable. His manner and address struck me favourably, and he has even a certain dignity."

"The partners of the Northwest concern," smiled Selkirk, "take life as they find it, and are equally at home in the city or in the wilderness: the exigencies of their wild country give them an appreciation of Montreal, so they turn readily from the camp-fire to a mahogany table and wax candles and back again. Sir James, I venture to wish that your company saw fit to establish some social contact with them, when I believe that your present difficulties might be smoothed out, also that their quality and ability stood higher in your view. If you knew them better you might not dismiss them as mere poachers. I say nothing of their courage—it needs no comment—but no poacher has their brains and business instinct."

"Possibly, my lord, possibly, but that does not alter the existing fact that they are poachers."

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Selkirk, though realizing that he was making no impression stuck to his subject.

"When in Montreal," he continued, "I was informed that Sir Alec during his recent visit to England had taken some steps towards buying you out."

At this the Governor turned purple. "Yes, he did actually have that effrontery. Damme, sir, there is no mad enterprise beyond their inclination."

The young nobleman looked slightly amused : he himself, already a small shareholder in the Hudson's Bay company, knew all about Mackenzie's offer, it having been made with his own private support ; also he knew that it had failed because certain members of the committee, harassed by sharpening competition, and quite willing to sell, had not been able to secure enough stock to negotiate.

"Perhaps, sir, you are not aware that such a purchase was Sir Alec's own idea, and not approved by all his associates, for there is in Montreal at the present time no fear of your traders. My own impression is that they rather enjoy the contest and find it a stimulus to still greater efforts : and yet," he added thoughtfully, "without some co-operation between your concerns the development of those great areas must be very slow."

"I am not sure, my lord, that we wish them as you say developed : our harvest grows on the backs of animals, and the coming of the plough spells death to the fur trade."

"Do you expect, sir, that this fur trade will last for ever—and when it comes to an end, what then ?"

"There is time enough to think of that, also I am convinced that the interior of the Canadas will never

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yield to the plough, the country is too wild, rocky and inaccessible."

"Sir James, I am certain you are mistaken. I have learned that in the vicinity of the Red River, which is approached by the Nelson River and Lake Winnipeg from your York Factory, there is a very large tract practically ready for cultivation, with a rich soil and climate not too rigorous. At present it is overrun by the buffalo, and here the Canadians find their supply of pemmican which they secure from savage hunters. Now I have a proposal to make to your company with regard to that area."

"A proposal, my lord?"

"Yes, I would like to acquire it, that is a portion of it, approximately one hundred thousand square miles."

The Governor stared at him. "Acquire one hundred thousand square miles! That is an empire!"

"It sounds large, yet is but a fraction of what would be left. My purpose is to establish another settlement."

Sir James shook his head with determination. "That is our domain, my lord, our domain. I respect your ambitions; they are laudable but entirely visionary. This company does not welcome the settler to our trapping-grounds, and the flesh of the buffalo is as essential to us as to the Canadians. Any settlement would soon destroy those herds and there is nothing to replace them."

"Your mind is quite made up in this matter?"

"Without question, and I must warn you that should any such suggestion be formally made I will oppose it most strongly."

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Selkirk gave a slight shrug : were the truth to be told he had not expected to make much progress to-day, being merely desirous of taking soundings, and already an alternative was taking shape in his mind, so now he put the matter aside.

" Well, perhaps you may consider it more favourably later on. What price does your fur bring to-day ? "

" The supply is scant, the quality poor and prices are low, also that pestilent Napoleon with his habit of blockade has unsettled business on the Continent and I foresee the time when we shall have to deal with him forcibly ourselves. But getting back to the Canadian partners—you have recently met and talked with them—might I have your impressions ? "

" It is my belief," said the Earl frankly, " that until you come to some sort of terms there can be no peace in the interior. Those are determined men who cannot be expected to have any love for the English, and are gradually carving out a new country where I am convinced possibilities are enormous. Will you not make the opportunity to go and see it for yourself as I have ? "

Sir James demurred at that : he had a large town house, and on Saturdays would drive out to his thousand-acre estate at Edmonton : his life was ordered, his rent-roll large and fat ; he damned all foreigners, beginning with Napoleon, turned up his nose at the Scots and was irretrievably English. He thought Selkirk restless, too restless to be sound, with his new-fangled ideas about colonizing in America as though what had happened out there forty years previously were not warning enough. But since this young man, though owning large Highland areas, came from just

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over the border, he was forgiven his nationality in London where he was very popular.

"No, I do not fancy trusting myself to those flimsy craft made of tree-bark in which I am told the Canadian partners journey. No, my lord, the Englishman's place to do business is at home and avoid all commitments abroad except of course in India. The war with our own blood in America cost this country a hundred million sterling, and we would not have lost that affair had not our fleet been busy fighting half the civilized world. Believe me, the other nations are only too happy to come to us for what they need, and if we cannot supply it they are at liberty to try elsewhere."

Selkirk's manner intimated that he had heard but no more: he was contrasting this stolid self-complacency with the wild dare-devil and shrewdly adventurous spirit of his late hosts in Montreal, with their energy, courage and sharp understanding of the raw land they lived in. He himself had heard the call of that land, its vastness intrigued, its far horizon beckoned, he saw his own people transplanted there exchanging lean crofter holdings for rich deep virgin soil, fear for freedom, contentment for uncertainty, independence for thralldom. All it needed was fortitude and faith; he could trust his Highlanders for that, and opposition only strengthened his purpose.

"Sir," he rejoined earnestly, "may I again suggest that your company reconsider its attitude, for I think the Canadians would meet you half-way. You say that your exclusive rights beyond the seas have been upheld, but the tribunal that weighed the matter is not aware of the magnitude of what it judged. For instance, there is one lake in that country in which this

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England would be an island, and weeks are required to traverse its northern shore."

"Weeks! Is that credible?"

"There is no reason to doubt it, and you gentlemen cannot seal a pass a thousand miles wide peopled with savages. Your rivals are on the spot and not less determined than you. They follow the fur, it being their joy and pride to do so, and are, it seems, almost at the elbow of the hunter when he takes the animal from the trap. Their French companions speak the savage tongue, marry savage women thus establishing the bond, and I do not believe that you will ever break it."

"You make a strong case for the Canadians," said Sir James, impressed in spite of himself.

"I only speak of what I have seen, also there is another point. For the past few years they have been at a difference with the XY, and Sir Alexander——"

"It might interest you to hear," put in the Governor, "that that gentleman has actually acquired a small block of our shares, which enabled him to attend our last meeting and learn more of our affairs than we wished."

Selkirk smiled a little, "Yes, I knew of that. Like his associates he has a sharp mind, and of course refused to conform to the arbitrary way of the late Mr. McTavish. Now Mr. McTavish's death has brought peace between the rival concerns in Montreal."

"So I learn," said Sir James abruptly. "Tchk! Tchk! Did you hear what that last lot of beaver pelts brought?—only eight shillings a pound. It is ruinous! My lord, the Committee is dining together to-night; we would be honoured by your company."

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"Even though so late a guest of the Beaver Club?" said Selkirk with a little bow.

It was an important group with Sir James presiding, Lord Selkirk on his right and Mr. Nicholas Caesar Corsellis, Deputy Governor, at the other end of the table: between them sat members of the nobility with substantial London merchants, and however serious might be the health of the great company they represented no shadow of this fell on the long mahogany table with its crystal and old silver. Tall candles burned with spear-head flame in silver sconces against the wall. There was turtle soup, salmon from the Tweed, turbot, roast capon, a vast joint, French pastries, old madeira, vintage port, cigars from Cuba.

The Hudson's Bay company was but one of many concerns with which these men were interested, all of which had suffered by the continental wars, and when the port went round, the talk which had so far been lethargic, turned automatically to Napoleon.

"I tell you, my lord," said the gentleman on Selkirk's right—Mr. George Wegg, a tea merchant of Mincing Lane—"it lies with us finally to dispose of that buccaneer. Admiral Nelson gave him something to think about at Aboukir Bay not long ago, and now Villeneuve is bottled up in Toulon harbour. Thank God we still have Nelson. Do they speak much of Napoleon in the Canadas?"

"But very little, sir, there is a natural interest but no alarm."

"Yet the French are numerous there."

"Yes, but now are good subjects, and more occupied in their new country than the land they left years ago.

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The French will always contribute their own colour to the Canadas, they combine well with the Scots, and care only for the degree to which Napoleon disturbs their trade. Otherwise they are uninterested."

"Trade ! I agree—I find the same. My tea-ships from China suffer much from French privateers. What between them and the Barbary pirates of Sallec and Algiers the high seas have been perilous, but I will admit that the American navy is doing excellent work on the Barbary coast ; their frigates are fast and well-found. What make you of affairs in the United States at present ? "

"I know little of opinion in New York, but when in Montreal I met Mr. Jacob Astor from that city who told me that his government is reaching west across the buffalo plains. He persuaded them to send an expedition to the Pacific coast which will fortify his intention to capture the fur trade there."

"How fare the still loyal British in those United States ? "

"There are but few left ; they have emigrated to Canada and become still more loyal. As between the Canadas and the States the feeling is touchy and I anticipate trouble before long."

"There is trouble enough for the present," sighed Mr. Wegg, then his manner changing, "my lord, you are not unacquainted with our affairs, you know that we pay but a four per cent dividend after a hundred years of far more than that amount, and even this payment is not over secure for the future, also you are conversant with what is going on in Montreal—can you make any suggestion by which our business may be improved ? "

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"I did hazard something this afternoon," said Selkirk, "but found it not over welcome."

Mr. Wegg leaned forward. "Governor," he said, "I have asked his lordship a question which he hesitates to answer though it should be of value to us. He thinks it might not be in place."

Sir James fingered his glass. "There is every licence at this table and I beg him to answer."

"Well, gentlemen," began Selkirk, "though no trader, I will be very frank. From what I learned in Montreal where your actions are of much moment to the Canadians, your methods are precisely the same as theirs; you both as a preliminary debauch the savage with liquor."

"But they began it," put in the Governor stoutly, "and we were forced to follow. Certainly we do not approve, yet without liquor we should get no fur."

"Does it matter who did it first if to-day it is standard practice on both sides? Gentlemen, I am I hope a humanitarian and greatly shocked at what I hear of the result of this custom, and were it discontinued you would be in the same relationship with your costs much diminished. Is this not possible?"

The Governor shook his powdered head. "We are not averse from the idea, but could not trust the Canadians to do their part."

"Then you will not successfully meet them in any other ways. I am a Southron Scot, but have enough friends in London to feel at home here, and speak of what I know of the other side. You English have conquered Scotland, but not the Scots, and those in the Canadas when they think of this country think not of England but the sad land to which they and I belong,

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and it does not soften their memories that you should have named one of your chief posts Cumberland House after the Butcher who stained the Highlands with Scots' blood. Forgive me if I sound intemperate."

"While respecting your natural instinct," said Mr. Corsellis, who had joined them with his wine, "I must differ from your conclusions. We were in the North Americas long before the Scots, only the French preceded us, and because we could not be gamekeepers to half a continent they came as free-trading trespassers who later banded for self-protection and to do us the greater injury. They have demoralized what was a peaceful profitable trade; that continues, and dividends or no dividends we will neither make nor entertain any advances. You said just now that you anticipated trouble from the United States, but I do not think that important. A small community, sir, very small."

"But nearly four millions of people both united and democratic and sensible of their own power. They are bound to become rich. In the Southern States Mr. Whitney's new wire gin enables a slave to clean a thousand pounds of cotton a day instead of six, and forty million pounds of this cotton they sold last year."

"Grist to our Lancashire mills, my lord, grist to our mills."

"But may you not become too dependent on that product? With part of the proceeds they have bought Louisiana from Napoleon which ends all Spanish intrigue in the new world, and now the Americans look abroad, especially to the high seas."

"That should let them know where England stands," chuckled Sir James.

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"It does, sir, and they are ill-content. President Jefferson and his Congress object to the British blockade of enemy ports on the Continent, and the right of search of neutral ships that our navy enforces."

"We have paid dearly for that right," interjected Mr. Wegg.

"They disagree with you there. You are doubtless aware, sir, that should an American sailor lose his papers our navy will impress him for service merely on the ground that he speaks English."

"The only civilized language in the world, my lord, and I think the navy is right: I am a Whig myself, but Mr. Pitt, in spite of recent reverses, still has a head on his shoulders."

This indifference, it seemed congenital, was disheartening, and the young man felt that he had encountered a stone wall.

"Well," he said, "I trust that the worst may not arrive, but the folk of the United States are irritated and undoubtedly hostile to this country. Should it come to war, their first move will be the invasion of Canada."

Mr. Wegg pushed out his rosy lips: his firm had had business in Boston, terminated some thirty years previously when a large number of chests of the best Souchong had been bundled into the harbour of that aspiring town. Since then his western trade was with Canada. "Well," he countered, "we have a good force of militia in Montreal, and the Scots are also there. From all you tell me I fancy they can look after themselves, and our real concern is with Napoleon. My lord, the port is with you."

CHAPTER X

LUST

A SHINING pall had enshrouded Buffalo Fort : in spruce thickets the wide green branches were burdened deep, at times as though at the touch of an invisible finger the white freight slid from them with muffled softness when, swaying a little, they spread aromatic arms to collect anew the fruitage of winter skies. Out on the lake ice was two feet thick, when the nets were lifted the dark waters smoked like steam : silence engulfed the world except when sharp rifle-like cracks of expansion ricocheted across from shore to shore, and the trunks of cotton woods could be heard splitting as the frost struck into their hearts.

It was in this season that Macdonald most favoured his liquor ; the strong rum warmed his thinning blood while night after night he sat reading successive year-old copies of the *Scotsman*, musing about events that the rest of the world was forgetting, tipping in front of a great fire till his head would lop forward, chin slackening, and he slid off into a drowsy stupor. But when morning came round it always found him alert. In these days he saw little of Julie and so far had made no advances, while the girl avoided him so much as she might. At sunrise, which now came about nine o'clock for there were only a few hours of real light, she would

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harness her dogs and set out alone for her trap-lines or in pursuit of fresh meat, and not return till dark. She never went into the store while he was there, and when she did happen to encounter him she nodded without meeting his eyes and passed on. Macdonald made no attempt to follow, nor had he entered Bouché's house since the guide left.

Late in December he investigated his store of provisions to find it far too low for security. Usually by this time there had been numerous visits by Indians bringing not only fur for trade but also carcasses of moose and the woodland caribou often to be killed in this section of the interior, but ever since the death of Pinné the fort seemed to have been shunned by savages, and week after week went by with only a handful of natives trailing across the lake. Macdonald puzzled over this, cursed his luck and turned again to his rum.

Game also was notably scarce, and Goudreau and Larose, two of the remaining *engagés*, hunted without avail : it appeared that the moose had yarded in some secluded spot when the deep snows came and were not travelling, while the caribou contrary to their custom had moved north across the height of land towards the fringes of the Barrens. Such natives as the guides encountered were sullen and silent ; if they had meat they would not trade it ; liquor for once failed to loosen their tongues, and what fur they had taken was already sold to the English. So far as Macdonald could see, Buffalo Lake was marooned in a hostile wilderness.

He brooded over this for a while, supplies still dwindling, then summoned Larose.

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"*Mon vieux*," he said, "this matter becomes grave. You have killed practically nothing this winter while I have sixty mouths to feed."

"We worked hard, m'sieu, but killed only three caribou on three trips, and those we ate, having little else: also we found no moose. To me it seems that the savage has them all."

"You saw nothing of Petaun's people?"

"M'sieu, not one: I am told they have moved to the east and do business with the English who give them much debt."

"Nor heard of Mr. Campbell and Bouché?"

"At one time we have seen what I think are their tracks which also went east towards the country of the English river, but they left no message on the way."

"That is quite likely. Now how long will it take you to go to Green Lake and bring back pemmican?"

Larose stood scratching his head. "*Cela depend*—Lac Vert she's about one hundred and fifty miles from here—that's maybe two weeks, m'sieu, maybe some little more if the snow she's too deep. How much pemmican you want?"

"Six trains of six dogs will pull five hundredweight each, and I can give you the best dogs. You will take Goudreau with four other men and a letter to Mr. Macdougall. I will expect you back in fourteen days, not more."

Larose, murmuring something, looked dejected.

"What's the matter with you?" snapped the bourgeois.

"M'sieu, *la Nouvelle Année*, she's come next week, so Jacques and I we much like to be with our womans on that night and make little *régale*."

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Macdonald, accustomed to instant obedience, felt nettled : he well knew that with the Norwesters the first day of the new year was the most important of all that followed. Christmas meant little to any Scot, but the first of January was always celebrated with ardour ; then discipline relaxed, provisions and drink were distributed and the hours given up to festivity ; the *coureurs de bois* sang the old songs to the strings of a crazy fiddle and lived again former days in a Canada that many of them would never see except in longing vision.

That, too, was the time of *La Chasse Galerie*, a dream dreamed by many a Canadian in the far interior, when a fleet of ghostly canoes would embark their exiled spirits, transporting them in a moment of time and above the clouds back to old Canada, back to the Saguenay and Baie des Pères and the Richelieu where for a few hours they would be gay and young once more, dancing with the girls, singing the old chansons, drinking the vin blanc instead of watered high wine till as the clock struck midnight, they sailed off again through the skies to waken amongst Piegans and Crées and Blackfeet with only that dear memory to carry them through to the next *Nouvelle Année*.

Such were the thoughts in the mind of Larose as he stammered a child-like petition, but against it there lay on Macdonald responsibility for feeding sixty souls that looked to him for sustenance. Nothing could replace the strong greasy buffalo meat of the south that was now running low ; even were caribou more easily got, that flesh had lesser nourishment ; there were no beaver in the vicinity, the white pink-eyed rabbits were thinned by a disease that took them every seventh

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year, and Buffalo Lake was rapidly being fished out.

"You will get your liquor when you return and not before and then be as drunk as you desire, but this is an urgent matter so take the best men and dogs. Should Mr. Macdougall not have the thirty hundred-weight to spare he will tell you where to go, and my orders are not to return without it."

Larose sighed and went out : in the yard he met Julie and gave her the news.

"You leave at once, Paul?" said she, frowning a little.

"To-morrow at dawn with old Jacques Goudreau—it is bad luck, that."

"And for two weeks?"

"It may be more and we shall miss the *régale* : I said that to the bourgeois but he did not care. He is one hard man that bourgeois."

"I'd like to miss it too—can't you take me? I've got my own dogs, I'd help ; Paul, please take me."

"But the bourgeois would not permit, also we travel ver' fast. For myself I do not like it, but he speaks—and we go."

"Paul, you remember what my father told you before he left?"

"But yes : I was to be your father till he returned so what kind have I been—you tell me that, *chérie*."

"Good," she said gently, "very good, and I have been more happy because you were here ; I'll tell him when he gets back, but I wish you were not going now—it will leave just the bourgeois, Casgrain and Lachance, and I do not like any of those men."

"*Petite*, are you then afraid of something?"

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"Of nothing." She gave a little laugh. "I am very silly that is all, and shall miss you very much. *Bon voyage*, Paul, and come back soon."

He looked after her not quite content : the affair of a few months ago between the bourgeois and his young clerk was common knowledge, but since then Macdonald had been so distant that it was buried in the past and men only smiled when they spoke of it. The old one, they said, had only gone a little crazy, which often happened in the wilderness to those of his age, but now he took no interest in any woman, though within the fort were those who would not have repulsed him, so the fire had died, its ash lay cold. And they all knew that Julie was lonely for the young man with the yellow hair.

A grey and lowering sunrise when the two Frenchmen went off with their tall lean savages driving thirty sharp-nosed dogs, and Larose, a man of great physical strength, breaking trail, shoulders forward, arms loose, his shoes kicking up little powdery puffs. Julie with a sense of oppression watched their figures diminish across Buffalo Lake to the long point and vanish, then went back to the cabin to work on a pair of new racquettes. Bouché had fashioned and lashed the tough ash frames, and now she sat weaving lengths of moose babeche, or raw hide softened by soaking, into a springy webbing. This was an ancient art, and were the webbing rightly stretched it would not sag in the mild spring weather.

Thus occupied she would stop and stare into the fire, eyes cloudy, then examine the cabin with a vague disinterest, for here was the only substantial home she had ever known, and to-night it seemed home no longer.

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Though the outer world was still a mystery, something had made her more critical and comparative ; the log walls seemed to dissolve and far beyond this axe-hewn dwelling swam the phantom pictures she always painted after her talks with Neil ; pictures of Montreal with its great houses of stone, its horses—she had seen only drawings of a horse but never a live one, which was something like a moose without a hump and no horns ; pictures of wonderfully dressed women, for in an old copy of the *Scotsman* she had found drawings of the way they dressed across the sea ; of the great ship that brought Neil over the Atlantic in four short weeks, of Neil's slate-roofed home, of milk—she had never tasted milk, of innumerable things small and great she had never hoped to attain before Neil came. It was strange, she thought, that her father should be content to live without all this, strange and not natural, but Neil would have it later on and loving him she would go with him. That to her mind was quite settled. He had said nothing of this himself, had never asked her to marry him or even be a country wife, but it could not be otherwise, and when once she spoke of it the uncertain look in his eyes told her that he was not ready for that yet.

Her mother had no place in all this ; the girl felt that soon in some unexpected way she would be separated from the withered woman who went wordless for hours, was content with so little, and just did what Bouché told her, suggesting nothing. She used to study her mother's features and dry figure that grew more and more bent, the misshapen copper-coloured hands whose palms were the colour of the old walrus tusk that Bouché had picked up from a northern trader,

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and marvel that she herself should be so different. Her mother would spend an hour cleaning a saucepan and Bouché didn't seem to care ; she expressed neither pleasure nor regret ; in summer she would sit half the day in the sun with the thick shawl still over her head and appear to feel neither heat nor cold. No trace was there left of the warm-blooded girl who took the frozen body of a young Frenchman in merciful arms and wooed it back to life. What, she wondered, could one do with such a mother.

After Neil's arrival Julie brooded no more about this for the first sight of him quickened her imagination, displacing all else. His manner, his courtesy, the uncouth strength of his body, the sober interest he displayed in all that was new to him, his quality of determination—all this she had not encountered before and it attracted her strongly. His dignity in the face of Macdonald's immediate dislike, and the way Bouché told her he had shaken the bourgeois till the man looked disjointed, it was all fascinating. Neil was different ; he wakened her love and soon she would have died to save him ; she dreamed about the affair with Macdonald, was thrilled that it should have been over her, and, loving Neil in her sleep, wondered when she would see in his eyes the dawn of desire, then rejoiced when it came. She knew that Bouché was ready to bestow her without further waiting, priest or no priest, and her heart had warmed that Neil should have held back, but to-night, alone, drawing the tough babeche between her fingers, she wished that he had had less restraint. It would have settled for ever the matter of the bourgeois, while she felt in her soul that this still remained unsettled.

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Macdonald's assumed indifference had gone too far, and she sensed it with the instinct of a wild creature that suspects a trap : not without some second motive had he rid himself of the four white men she knew and trusted, keeping Casgrain and Lachance who invariably flattered him with smooth tongues and spent licentious hours with native women. The women made them welcome, husbands did not object, and Macdonald shut his eyes.

Now followed a broken week : sometimes the sun shone so bright that the flat sheet of Buffalo Lake took on a blinding crystalline brilliance, hurting the eyes and causing blindness unless one used the horn blinkers that mitigated the upward glare ; then skies grew sombre, the clouds lowered and dragged, wind rose and snow drove from the north-west in slanting lines of stinging particles that cut the skin, marooning all within the stockade, forcing even fur and feather to seek shelter. In these gales every trail in the open was obliterated and only where spruce thickets spread broad and green could former tracks of the wide ribbed racquettes be distinguished. Julie marked such wild weather with misgiving ; it meant that Larose would be days overdue.

New Year's eve came dark and gloomy when the occupants of the fort filed through the store where Macdonald stood distributing the company's annual gifts to all ; there was liquor for each man, white or native, and a foot or so of Spencer's Twist ; to the women a yard of cloth, a pinch of tea, some lumps of sugar from the hard maple or a gilt gew-gaw from Birmingham. Doing this the man seemed to thaw a little, his sharp ferret-like eyes were more genial, they

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lost some of their furtiveness ; and such was the universal desire to cast off even for a small space the vast loneliness of life in some exhibition of good-will, that for a little while the atmosphere of the place seemed to change ; there was joking and laughter, old rivalries and animosities were forgotten, and the stranger who happened to find haven here would have pronounced it a frost-bound but contented Utopia. And now the drinking began ; there was much shouting, presently intoxicated men were reeling about embracing, exchanging maudlin compliments and sharing their liquor with native women.

The short day drew on with no abatement of storm ; complete darkness had descended at four in the afternoon, and Julie, who during this orgy kept closely to her cabin, was lighting a lamp fed by fish-oil when she heard steps in the outer kitchen.

"It is you, Mama?"

There was no answer, and the steps came on. MacDonald was standing in the doorway.

"M'sieu," she stammered.

He gave a nod, sent a glance round the comfort of the place, then one hard look at her and seated himself. His manner had deliberation, and at once she knew that though he had been drinking he was not drunk, which alarmed her the more.

"Why does m'sieu come here?"

"To pay you a little visit for *La Nouvelle Annee*," said he, "knowing you would be alone. That is not fair for one so young."

"I am not alone, m'sieu ; my mother is——"

"Is with other women of her people sharing something that brings contentment to every Cree." He

smiled coldly. "She is not thinking of her daughter, who is not very hospitable this evening, but I feel amiable and overlook that. Have you any news of your father?"

She shook her head. "I have been hoping, but there is no news. Then you have some?" she exclaimed, "my father is coming, perhaps to-night?"

"No," he replied coolly, "but to-day a runner passed on his way to the Athabasca and told me that Bouché had travelled far to the east near Reindeer Lake, which is as I instructed him, and would not return for some time." Here he paused, then added cynically, "I believe that your father was well but had taken little fur."

At once she felt convinced that he was lying, for had Bouché encountered a man bound in this direction certainly he would have written, even if Neil did not, so, crowding back her fears she made a pretence of interest and smothered the question she knew that Macdonald waited for.

"My father takes a long journey," she said calmly, "but he is at home in the strong woods."

At this good acting Macdonald's lips set a shade tighter: he felt irritated and showed it.

"I received no news of anyone else."

"Nor did I expect any: my father told me not to: that he was going to a country strange to him."

This brought a silence that she endured better than himself and she sat still with her hands folded, though every nerve lay on edge while he moved restlessly in his chair gnawing at a bearded lip, regarding her obliquely under half-lowered lids, and cursing a composure that only sharpened his appetite till the moment

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became too much for him and of a sudden his real purpose burst out.

"Julie, that is enough for those others. Now there is a matter I wish to speak of; it concerns you and me and to-night we will settle it."

"But no," she said quickly, "there is nothing any more to be settled—it was all ended before this."

"That is only nonsense: it may be that I have been asking too much, so your father said no, and perhaps he was right. But now I have changed my intent. I demanded you as my country wife, you and no other woman, but to-night I think otherwise. It is all quite simple. You will live with me this winter, then next summer I will take you when I meet the brigade at New Fort and there will be a priest to marry us. Meantime you will come to me. I will write my promise on paper for you to give Bouché when he returns. No woman of your blood can ask for more, and few of them get as much."

He said this smoothly, still controlling himself: it was sudden, not at all what she anticipated, and for an instant her guard went down: it was clever too, clever enough to be hard to deal with; there was no insult here, and more than one bourgeois had made such an alliance with one like herself with ultimate satisfaction for both. Now it seemed that she was in a sort of trap, so her brain worked quickly.

"That is not any use and nothing would make me do it. I have not changed."

"You will not marry me!"—he seemed almost bewildered—"not marry me?"

"Is it not enough that I do not love you?"

At this he sat for a moment quite still and she saw the

strong hairy fingers curling in towards the broad palms till they closed tight : it was the only sign he gave, till of a sudden he broke out :

" You are still young and a fool, but will do what I say for I am bourgeois here." He paused, pierced by jealousy. " If you were not a fool you would not be thinking of the man now in your mind."

" The one I do love ? " said she gallantly.

That shook him ; he stood up, brows contracted, the short barrel-shaped body rigid, eyes hot with growing anger. Thus erect and glowering, careless in dress and person, he looked uncouth and formidable, and imagining herself in those arms she gave a little shiver.

" You talk of young Campbell. I do not care what has been between him and you but that is over, and when he comes back to Buffalo Lake he will not remain but go across the mountains before the snow melts. You will not see him again. Should your father not agree, he goes too ; but you—you stay here with me."

" M'sieu," she said bravely, glimpsing one faint hope, " let it be like that, let us both wait till my father returns, and what he then says that I will do. I promise it."

" And if he does not return ? " countered Macdonald grimly.

Now at the look in his eyes a new fear took her and she saw the man to be capable of any extreme. Was it possible that he withheld grave news, and had disaster overtaken those two in the *pays d'en haut* ? Her heart stilled at the vision of them in the hands of hostile natives, and there crowded back the bloody tales that in past years she had heard with voiceless horror : she

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thought of torture, of finger joints lopped off one by one, of death that would be merciful did it not tarry so long in coming.

"There is no reason they should not return," she faltered, "and already you have told me that all is well. M'sieu, I am not frightened of this."

Macdonald tossed up his bearded chin. "We waste too much time you and I. I have said what I will do, but before that you will come to me—to-night, yes, to-night. I wait no longer."

She put a hand to her throat, breast heaving, her dark gaze burning into his, lips moving but not with words. She stood there while the suppleness of the young body taunted his hunger, and never he thought had a woman looked more desirable.

"Is that all?" he said thickly.

"I would kill myself first," she whispered.

"You brown bitch! Not till I have done with you!"

His arms shot out; he took her wrists, snatching her to him till both arms went round her. At this something of the tigress was roused in her; savage as hate she fought him desperately, writhing, twisting like an otter, sinking her teeth into his arm at which he yelped and used greater violence. An elbow under his chin thrust his head back. He growled like a dog and wrenched it away; her struggles only intensified his desire and he swore that such a concubine was worth conquering. With hungry triumph his mouth fastened on her throat.

"Mercy—your mercy," she panted, "for the sake of the dear God your mercy."

The answer came but not from Macdonald: the

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petition still quivered on her lips when there shrilled through outer darkness the sound that brings terror in the strong woods. The bourgeois heard it, his pulse slowed, his grip relaxed and he shrank back staring at her with startled incredulous eyes, no longer a menace but a man stricken with deadly fear.

It was the war-cry of the Crees.

CHAPTER XI

FIRE AND DEATH

PETAUN, The Otter, had returned to Buffalo Lake.

There is no measure of time in the wilderness, that element did not exist for the savage, so in the fashion of his people The Otter had taken his problem to a distant place where week after week he brooded over its solution, discussing many things with Mamanouska, for always the conjuror sat at his elbow.

Now the deep snows came, tall hunters brought in fresh meat and trapping of prime fur began again, but the thoughts of these two were not on fur, there being many more important matters to be weighed, and Mamanouska relished this season of counsel, for never before had Petaun taken him quite so seriously. At last, felt the conjuror, who knew that he was nearing the end of his days, his position was established and it behoved him to make no mistakes, so for hours he would sit, speaking not at all, interpreting the workings of Petaun's mind, reading that grave face as hunters read the face of winter snows, and exploring his own resources. Being thus saving of speech, what he did say sank deep, and finally he knew it would bear a scarlet fruit.

There were precedents for this when war parties farther south on the buffalo plains had jerked off many

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a white scalp, and, as the conjuror now reminded Petaun, hardly ever had retribution followed, which was natural and right. All one had to do was to move somewhere else. The white men had left their own country to seize that of Cree, Stony and Blackfoot, and in consequence of this the tribes, however bitter their own wars, were joined in hatred of the intruder. Also they despised him, and it was well to do away with what one despised. Therefore, maintained Mamamouska, Petaun would find supporters throughout the strong woods, and one could depend on their silence.

Nor was the red man ignorant about the concerns of the interloper. Owing to the mixed population within the high stockades, little went on there that did not soon filter out to be passed in a few muttered words across the wilderness. In the woods, themselves unseen, they watched the white man on his journey, marking well what he carried and whither he went, while beside his abandoned camp they read the tale of his doings. What he demanded and gave in return was weighed and argued in thousands of teepees that he never saw; were he easy in granting debt the news spread abroad. Did he drive a hard bargain every hunter knew it. But, admitted Mamamouska, he had one ally against whom the door-flap of no teepee stayed down. That was liquor.

This was truth, for the savage once tasting strong drink became undone, it lit strange fires in his blood, his fortifications tumbled, he was a child pleading for more. It did not work on him as on the whites, unloosing their lonely spirits, bringing a brief season of content, but with the people of the forest their mood, at first petitionary, changed to that of violence. Rea-

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son grew unhinged, the warrior felt for his axe and was a man to be shunned. For him the world had a sanguinary tinge.

Mamanouska, himself touching no liquor, was well aware of this. When Petaun asked him to seek guidance from the spirit land in the former matter, he had only done what was natural and received a straight answer. Believing what was imparted, the conjuror knew that one hunter would be killed at Buffalo Lake, but more than that had not been divulged, and when Pinné died under the axe of his brother the old man was secretly gratified. He had never liked Pinné, who refused to take him seriously.

Now, with his prophesy confirmed, he had earned the confidence of the tribe and the way stood open to further authority. He himself was very old, and this new affair had suggested that before he died he might arrange something that would be remembered for many years ; so it came that he stayed close by Petaun, who under skilful handling dreamed ever more vividly of revenge.

In December the chief made his first move, sending his old men, women and children to a spot still farther north where they must feed themselves, while he and his warriors travelled with caution to the south-west. By this time his purpose was known, and beside the camp-fire Mamanouska revealed in graphic speech that the spirit of the dead man not only desired the whites to be destroyed, but also promised supernatural aid. He assured them of this.

Broken weather favoured a wary advance, made without dogs and leaving only a single furrow to tell of the passage, while scouts roved ahead, questioning

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what few savages they found and returning to the main body at nightfall. The report was that no other band of Crees moved in the neighbourhood, but few tracks could be seen, game was very scarce and no white men were out hunting. Bouché, known to them all, and the new white man with yellow hair, had not come back from English River; two whites and six other men had gone south to the buffalo plains for pemmican, leaving but three whites in the fort; meat was running short—they got this from Bouché's woman when she was out on her trap-lines, but in spite of that a great feast would be held on the day after this one.

So in muffled silence the band moved on, using no fire-arms when they approached the lake, till on the morning of the last day of the year a snow-powdered hunter peering through a clump of hemlock saw the grey smoke climbing over the rectangular stockade. Then storm closed down and the stockade vanished.

Now council was held beside a small fire of wood so dry that it made no smoke, and Petaun, sharpening his scalping-knife with a fragment of soapstone, put a question that troubled him.

"We can come to the big fence, that is easy enough in the dark if the dogs do not smell us, but how shall we climb it? Also there will be men in the high places at each corner to shoot us down. I had thought that perhaps we might go to trade with axes under our shirts."

Mamanouska, a natural strategist, thought little of this.

"That fence," he creaked in a dry voice, "is twice as high as the tallest man, but not quite so high at the great gate. If it were the late summer we could make

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fire and shoot it over with arrows, but now there is too much snow. No, you will take two small spruce trees, cutting off most of each branch but not all, so there is left enough to hold the foot of a man. When it is dark we will lean them against that gate and climb over."

"And be shot," said Petaun promptly. "Do you yourself go first?"

"It is not so, and were I younger I would go first," countered Mamanouska with dignity, "also to-night the spirits have told me there will be no one in the high corners. From the top of the gate you will drop down without sound, and in this storm you should not be seen. When you have opened the gate wait till the rest are inside, and then," he concluded curtly, "remember your brother Pinné."

Petaun, perceiving this to be good counsel, laid the edge of his knife against his thumb to try its sharpness and whetted it smoothly against his moose-hide legging.

"And you—what will you do when we are inside?"

"Last winter I saw the beaver-robe of the chief white man which will keep me warm, also a small round thing in which on looking at it one's own face appears; with these I am content. For the rest of it I will stay close to you, but let not any of our own people be killed."

"There is the daughter of Bouché's woman," said Petaun thoughtfully, "who has white blood, what of her?"

The conjuror was silent for a moment: he knew Julie, had talked with her, and when he visited the fort in summer-time she had held converse in his own tongue

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as they sat in the sun on the lake shore. Certainly she had white blood, but in his grim old heart he admired her and did not want her slain.

"I could give her to one of my young men to whom she would bear many fine hunters," ruminated Petaun, "and it is not even too late for me to have another wife."

"No," said Mamanouska, "you will give her to me, it may be that I am not so ancient as I look; also she will teach me her language so that I may better serve my people."

That seemed a novel idea and Petaun was amused, then he frowned. Only three white men in the fort—only three white scalps! There might be difficulty over that.

"It being the night of a feast, perhaps they will be drunk," he hazarded.

"But they will not have drunk it all, and if you use wisdom in this matter the name of Petaun will not soon be forgotten."

Night came with no diminution of storm; two young spruce were cut and trimmed, the sound of axes blanketed in a laden thicket, and when it was very dark they started, keeping close to shore, ghostly figures in a long shuffling stride, the short hairs of chin and upper lip cased in filaments of ice, the hoods of their capotes, fashioned from the skin of the timber-wolf, with the triangular black-tipped ears still erect so that they themselves resembled wolves. Narrow-headed axes swung loose from their caribou-skin belts into which sheathed scalping-knives were thrust; their faces were unpainted, but the onyx eyes gleamed darkly bright for never before on these waters had the

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Crees assailed a white man's fort, and riches lay now almost within grasp.

First a line of green bushes marking where the nets were set, then a bare stretch of sloping shore, the canoe landing, and here the beaten trail leading to the great gate. At a sign from Petaun their snow-shoes were twisted off to be planted upright, and with the fort still out of view they smelled it as a man will smell wood-smoke afar off.

They moved slowly in single file, carrying the two young trees fashioned for ladders, while at every few steps Petaun halted to listen, and there came to his ears the sound of revelry just as Mamanouska had prophesied. Now the gate loomed ahead and here was a still longer wait till the young warriors began to twirl their axes impatiently. The smell of slaughter was in their nostrils.

Petaun, as befitting a chief, went up first, and reaching the top, wild head level with the sharpened timbers, he paused and leaned flat against the rough bark trying to penetrate what lay behind the still driving snow. Through some cabin windows he caught a faint glow and from the biggest building came a sound of reckless laughter of men, shrill cries of women's amusement, the squeaky strains of a fiddle and shreds of maudlin song. *La Nouvelle Annee* was being celebrated in Buffalo Fort, the guerites were deserted, and the two white men who should have been guarding them, deep in liquor.

Now Petaun threw a leg over the gate and dropped lightly; a moment later the heavy cross-beam was lifted, and from the wild hearts of thirty warriors burst a terrific yell.

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Macdonald, though a tippler, had never been a coward ; too many years he had spent in the interior for that, but at this sound his heart felt sick and over him swept the appalling conviction that all was lost. He, a bourgeois, had failed of his duty, the undreamed thing had happened, the emptiness had spoken. There was no help within call, and on him was to fall the wrath of those he despised.

He made a quick choking sound, pushed Julie from him, and ran out unarmed into a great silence, for after that first fierce cry Petaun, asserting his leadership, had smothered all sound and a strange stillness, the hush ere the storm broke, spread ominously through the fort. Every voice was quieted, the fiddle ceased to squeak and for a breathless instant there was a pause soon to be shattered by rising shouts of men, the terror-stricken shrieks of women. Now doors were flung open and a pale red gleam spread across the snow.

"Lachance !" called Macdonald hoarsely, "Casgrain ! *Les sauvages ! À moi, à moi !*"

Diving swiftly into his own house he snatched a loaded musket from the rack, steadied himself against the window and fired through it at the wild group advancing from the gate. Not less than thirty of them he reckoned, and knew that the end could not be far off. A hunter groaned, flung up his arms and fell. The bourgeois began to load again with desperate haste. Casgrain and Lachance were already firing, but unsteady hands sent their bullets astray, while Petaun came quickly on with Mamanouska at his heels and well behind him, for that night the conjuror was taking no personal risk. Petaun clutched his axe, there being work to be done before the store was broken open.

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Macdonald heard his door flung wide : wheeling sharply he encountered Petaun's insensate eyes, and knew the worst. Gripping the barrel, he swung his empty musket. An arrow sped through the window to stick quivering in the log wall beside him, and thus assailed back and front his nerve left him. The musket clattered down. Petaun stood motionless for an instant, his features convulsed with hate, and the bourgeois saw that his last moment had come. He heard yells outside, more gunshots, then groans. He could not speak, but instinctively put up his hands over his head, palms out. The axe whirled twice, and came hissing down between them.

Killing the two guides was a short affair for the others, too short and rather disappointing though three Crees paid for it with their lives, and to the remaining native *engagés* the warriors gave little attention. These were red men like themselves, and no enmity lay between them and the real business of the night awaited attention. Then came the sound of axes battering into the store, where by torch-light of resinous pine the Norwester's riches lay exposed, while in the cellar beneath was that much more to be desired.

Now the sight of these things with no whites to guard them was too much, confusion multiplied and the authority of Petaun was at an end. Two hunters leaped into the cellar, handing up small casks of rum, tin pannikins were seized from the shelves, the casks holed with axes and the liquor spouted freely. Brown hands shaking with excitement thrust dishes into the potent stream, its familiar fire inflamed their blood and the real orgy began. In scattered cabins crouched women, their dark heads shrouded in shawls, clasping

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their children, while the native fort *engagés*, realizing by now that no danger threatened men of their skin, came out to pick up what plunder they might. The fort was in the hands of those who had nothing to lose.

Soon the floor of the store became littered with trade goods to the value of thousands of pelts, goods brought by back-breaking routes from New Fort and Montreal, but since they could be had without the skins, Petaun's hunters trampled them in drunken disdain. At times a man would lurch across the counter for something he fancied, toss it away, with a sweep of his arm clear the shelf and turn again to his revels. The liquor spurted on, wasting itself in shining rivulets that trickled under heaps of cotton, blankets from Witney, twists of strong tobacco from Virginia.

Of all Petaun's wild band only Mamanouska had touched no rum and kept his head. He alone was coldly sober, his brain working very fast. Already on his own account he had been busy and over his shoulders hung the rich brown robe he had found, as expected, in the house where Macdonald lay with his skull split and a horrible red patch on his skull, for the scalp had been lifted. Inside the conjuror's shirt was a small copper-backed mirror, and at his waist hung a knife of very many small strange blades that had captured his fancy, so in one sense he was content, but to his own surprise, not entirely.

Standing a little apart, watching the scene with wise old eyes, he felt very old. It seemed that he had not completely sensed all this before, but that could only be because his heart was too aged to leap, nor did his blood feel hot, though this ultimate triumph had come

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as a result of his counsel. Here was the confirmation of prophesy, but strangely enough it left his spirit unsatisfied, and the present sight of the strongest of his people, Petaun amongst them, somehow disconcerted him and he felt oddly abased.

His nature was conservative, he alone amongst his tribe gave consideration to the future, while for the rest there was only the present, and what, he now wondered, would come of this bloody business? Who would ultimately pay for it?—certainly not the whites. The predicted thing had come about and he found it unwelcome: three white men had been killed, but what was that amongst the many he knew of? and so long as others brought these strong waters to plain and forest they would remain the real masters. He had been wrong, all wrong!

Then into his anxious brain came the thought of the daughter of Bouché's woman.

Julie knelt in a corner, trembling, strength had run out of her. The reports of muskets with the choking death-cries of Casgrain and Lachance had come to her clearly for they fell not far off between her cabin and the great gate. Of her mother she knew nothing except that being a Cree she stood in little danger. The girl did not know that Macdonald was dead, but it must be so because they would search for him first, and how strange that they should have come at the moment of her own peril. She heard wild shouts from the store and the whimpering of her own dogs staked out near the kitchen, the only dogs left in the fort. Now she crept to the window, opened it a fraction, and looked out. Snow had ceased to fall and the moon shone clear, beaming placidly amongst a com-

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pany of twinkling stars. A few yards off lay the two guides with dark patches under their heads. At this she shuddered and felt pulsing in her own body a conflict that sickened her, for through her own veins ran the blood of those who had done this thing, so that her white blood subdued the red, and even in her hard extremity she felt stained with guilt. Lights flickered in the store from which most of the shouting came; she caught glimpses of wild faces under brandished torches while warriors reeled in and out, some of them draped in women's clothing from the ravished shelves.

Then a man came straight for her cabin: the door burst open and there entered Mamanouska, wrapped in a beaver robe that she knew too well. It told her all. He stood regarding her, his mask-like features unmoved, then made a sign and she saw that no hatred was in him. It was the sign of friendship.

"You are not hurt?" said he in the Cree tongue.

She shook her head.

"Have none been here?"

"Two men came and looked inside, but I was hiding. They saw nothing then went away. What do you want?"

"I speak quickly for there is not much time. Now listen and do not speak at all."

His calmness brought a little comfort and she nodded.

"Petaun having killed his brother after drinking strong water from this place, made a promise to the spirits that he would kill all the whites who had to do with this business. This he has partly done, save four that are away, and it is well that your father and the

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man with yellow hair are elsewhere. If he finds them he will kill them also, then being content himself to die. As to you, it was in his mind to give you to one of his hunters to breed other hunters, but I told him that I myself desired a wife and——”

“You !” She stared at the seamed face.

“I myself desired a wife,” continued the conjuror with dignity, “though since hair came on my body I have known no woman, so he said that it was well. Have you any words concerning that ?”

— She could not answer and the old man’s eyes rested on her with changing expression.

“Now listen, for I speak with a straight tongue. The days of my years will soon end ; I have lived long and seen many things. Much blood have I seen, and the death-cries of many warriors are in my ears, but to-night my heart is soft and feels mercy. That is why I asked for you, and having you can do what I will. I do not desire a young wife. My bones are like glass, my blood has become cold and a woman’s breast will not keep me warm. Presently I take the long journey and would travel without regret. Do you understand ?”

This seemed honest but instinctively she dreaded a trap. “Why then are you here ?”

“To say what you must do unless you wish to live with the tribe and perhaps lie with Petaun himself ; I read that in his eyes though he did not say it in words. Again listen to me. For to-night no man in this place will think of you save only myself, but to-morrow it will be otherwise. Therefore get ready, harness your dogs and travel quickly into the strong woods. Our dogs are one day’s full journey from here. Finding your

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father and that other, tell them what has happened here and also of Mamanouska, the Conjuror, who refused a young wife to keep him warm. I have spoken."

She gazed at him with incredulity, but he remained quiet, assured, while outside the riot grew greater. The *engagés*, scenting coming trouble, were in hiding with their spoil, leaving only Petaun's men, drinking and waving torches. Terrible children of the forest, they did fantastic things, laughing, crying, dancing, chanting a harsh monotone while the rum inflamed them the more, and their eyes glowed with the red glow of murder. The lust to kill was again rising, and Mamanouska knew it.

"I go now, alone?" faltered Julie.

"You go alone."

"But my mother—she——"

"She will be safe, also she is very drunk, therefore go quickly, for if these men see you it is too late. They might not leave you to me."

At this her brain suddenly cleared as though a wind had blown through it, and he sent her a smile that gave his lined features a grave benignity.

"I go now to Petaun to occupy him while I can, but do not know how long that will be, so when you are ready to start put out the light. When you find your father and that other speak well of Mamanouska, the Conjuror."

A moment later Petaun felt a hand on his shoulder. He, too, had been drinking but not so deeply as the others, and his brain remained clear. Now it seemed to him a great waste was going on, great riches being thrown away before his eyes, and when Mamanouska

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expressed exactly the same thought he got immediate hearing.

"These men are but fools and children," urged the counsellor, "and not in many years can they gain what they now destroy, so make them place what they would keep in a spot by itself instead of walking over it. There is also the buffalo meat. Have you forgotten that? Also with these torches there is danger of consuming all, so let us move it to safety. Cannot your hunters yet for a little while be men?"

That went home, and Petaun with those who could still stand upright commenced to salvage what they might; staggering in and out of the store they built a pyramid with armsful of goods and clothing, a chaotic pile higher than the tallest. Twenty beaver skins meant nothing that night, fortunes were flung about, precious muskets heaped in the snow, and for a full half-hour the looting went on till there was left in the store only trodden refuse soaked in strong spirit. Now Mamanouska, whose attention had never left Julie's cabin, saw the light extinguished and played his last card. He said to Petaun:

"I have heard that there behind the store is that of most value, the fur that has been traded. Close to it is the gunpowder. Some of this is our fur for which we got but little, so let us take it again and perhaps sell it to the English."

This sounded brilliant, it had its effect. Men crowded into the fur house while Mamanouska held his breath till he heard a dog bark and saw a slight figure darting for the great gate ahead of a team. In five seconds it was clear.

Half an hour later Julie paused for breath on the

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crown of a hill three miles from Buffalo Lake, while her panting dogs buried their black noses. She looked back and saw to the south-west something like a red star on the horizon that glowed, palpitated and seemed to change shape. Now it increased, shooting out smaller stars, taking the form of an arrow-head pointed at the moon, now it blossomed like a flower, casting towards her a pink lane across the wilderness of snow.

There the orgy touched its climax, rum had done its work and Petaun, his authority ended, was thrust aside by his own warriors. The fort square resounded with savage howling from wild throats. Some hunters were pawing the fur lifted from their own traps, Macdonald's remaining skins of pemmican lay on the pyramid with bundles of the *Edinburgh Scotsman* and feather-bound ledgers in which the dealings of the post for years past were recorded in fine script by a succession of clerks. To the Norwesters they were precious, but the Crees feared them as mysterious things used by all white men to keep other people in debt, therefore they would be torn to pieces later on. No liquor was now left in the cellar, the last few casks spouted almost unheeded, most of the *engagés* were helpless, while the few not drunk made ready for escape. But there were no dogs.

Then a frantic man tossed his torch into the broached head of a powder-keg.

It was but a few moments later that Mamanouska, halting half-way to the lake looked back. Following the first huge spout of flame, fire had taken the store and it glowed like a live brand fed by rum-soaked goods from England; the pyramid was on fire, belching red

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in a gigantic candle, exuding streams of blazing pemmican grease ; fire had spread to the cabins, from heavy roofs came a hissing drip as the split logs wept into the furnace beneath and long red tongues leaped from the small windows. In the explosion many had been killed outright, amongst them Petaun, and fire stroked their prostrate bodies. The crackling roar constantly increased while figures darted about, dragging women and children, carrying axes, snow-shoes and what little they might salvage from the doomed cabins. Few of them, reflected the old man wrapping the beaver robe more closely, would live to see another night, for the nearest post on Lac Ile a la Crosse was two days' journey distant, and he sensed the coming of a great frost.

Now fire had reached the stockade itself so that Buffalo Fort was ringed with flame. But he did not wish to see it.

Turning, he struck into the beaten lakeward track, halting at a small forest of snow-shoes from which he selected his own and thrust his feet into the moose-hide straps. He was frightened and wanted to get away, but some fascination held him, seeming to twist his head round, and he watched figures of *engagés* who, still unable to accept what was happening, waited, stupefied, incapable of action, mesmerized by the destruction of all they had in the world. There, thought the conjuror, lay Petaun and many of the tribe ; most of his old friends were dead, there would be wailing amongst the women when the news came, and it did not please him to carry that news, so what was there now left in life for himself. He felt inexpressibly lonely.

Then his eye caught a new trail made within the

Fire and Death

half-hour by one person travelling with five dogs very fast to the north-east, it was the trail of one who at least owed him something.

Instinctively he followed it.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE STRONG WOODS

IT was with a sense of liberation that Big Angus saw the stark outline of York Factory recede into the east. For some years the place had been a sort of home, though it never really meant anything to him; his lonely and stubborn mood had developed no companion there, and this journey on which he now embarked was a bit of work well suited to his sense of independence. He knew himself to be truculent and forbidding, and was quite content that it should be so.

Having been left, and shrewdly, by Macnab to make his own choice of men, he picked out five amongst the strongest Swampy Crees from the Factory *engagés*, headed by one Keego, the Fish. Their tongue had long been familiar to him, and a knowledge of it would in these latitudes take one comfortably across fifteen hundred miles of continent till on the slopes of the western mountains dissimilar tribes were encountered. These semi-civilized savages found on the Great Bay were as a race shorter, broader, stronger than their kinsmen, and Macnab like his brother factors held them under a discipline of iron unknown in the forts of the Norwesters. To all effect they were slaves; did they trap fur and not bring it in they were flogged without mercy; did they steal any property they

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might be shot forthwith. That was the law, and it reflected the new belief to which the English had now been forced, that tenure of this wild country hung on complete domination of its wild tribes. The old days of beneficent government had long been over.

Angus had no illusions about his journey, and Macnab noting the men he chose smiled and said nothing ; it meant that his five most difficult *engages* were off his hands for a month to come. The chief clerk, saluting, said good-bye ; the factor, gripping the huge palm, wished him every success, while the look in his eyes told quite clearly that this meant damnation to the Norwesters. There were things that the company did not authorize, officially, but not yet under that flag had any condolences been offered when disaster overtook some post of their Canadian rivals. The company, argued Angus to himself, was fettered by its own code of morals, while morals to his mind had small place in the fur trade. And he knew that Macnab was getting desperate.

Travelling up the broad avenue of the Nelson he reached Split Lake, then struck due west, gathering in what fur he could and leaving it at Macnab's credit with the company's post of Nelson House. Keeping well north of the Churchill, he pushed on.

Reindeer Lake is shaped like a pear two hundred miles long with the stalk at its south end : fed by a multitude of streams its flood eventually reaches the Great Bay, and on these head waters Angus learned that the Canadians were active.

He welcomed the news. His party was strong, well found, well armed and under no misapprehension, so at night round the camp-fire he would glance at

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Keego's grim features and feel assured. The Cree, a man approaching sixty, had not abated his bodily powers, and his repellent visage was accentuated by a puckered gash, received more than thirty years previously when with Samuel Hearne he had joined the Dogribs in an overland journey across the Barrens to the Coppermine, and spilled unsuspecting Eskimo blood in a massacre at Bloody Falls. Later he had journeyed west of the Saskatchewan, lived with Piegans and Blackfeet, and took part in the storming and burning of old Fort Brulé on the buffalo plains. Then, his mood changing, he had travelled down the Nelson, professed loyalty to the English, and was entered by Macnab, ignorant of the man's past, amongst the home-guard of York Factory. But Keego was known farther west as a bad Indian and feared by his kinsmen. His sombre nature responded to the dourness of his present leader, and between him and Angus there had from the first been a sort of voiceless understanding. They seemed to be attracted by their mutual antipathies.

At the south end of Reindeer Lake there was to Angus's knowledge a new Canadian fort, and to avoid this, for word of his journey was now abroad in the district, he laid his course to pass at a little distance, and reached at nightfall a wide stream whose glare ice had been swept clear by the wind. Where he stood, a piercing northern gale whistled through a grove of naked birch and from this there was no escape, but on the far bank rose a belt of spruce with good shelter.

"We go on and camp there," he said to Keego in his own tongue.

The Indian made a gesture and looked sulky.

"That ice is not good, it is not thick, some of it does

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not lie on the water which has fallen beneath it. We stay here."

"We go on," rasped Angus.

Keego sat down and lit his pipe.

"Afraid?" the voice lifted.

"I am not a fool, and we will find a better place to-morrow."

"If it will carry me it will carry you."

Angus, accustomed to instant obedience, felt choky, and there was but one thing to do. Twisting off his shoes, he tied them to the leading toboggan, snatched Keego's long-tongued whip and lashed at the team. They whimpered, then plunged forward. He followed.

The ice was like glass, making it hard to stand against a bitter wind. The toboggan offered no resistance, at once the slithering dogs drew ahead, and himself half-way over he saw them reach the opposite bank. He shouted and the dogs stopped. At the same moment came a dull crunching sound, and he felt himself sink: instinctively his arms shot out and he remained suspended up to his throat in a chilling flood. The ice, here only a thin glass bridge, stood clear of the water, a strong current tugged at his body pulling him sideways, and a great cold struck at his heart. His breath left him, he gasped, his feet began to feel dead.

Swinging there like a netted fish, he saw the shore where Keego and the others were now slashing at small trees for poles to use if the ice would carry them, but with the pull of the river his arms began to slip, and he knew what must be done or he would be drawn under.

First he doubled up his right arm, dipped it deep, then swung it out and down on the ice. Instantly the

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sleeve was glued there. It felt solid. Then the other, so that his position was that of a man on a cross. The only dry part of him was his fur cap.

Now he commenced to pull gently, but the ice broke against his breast when he put any weight on it so that he grew desperate and began wrenching his arms free, slapping them forward again, ploughing his way through the river's sharp skin till he should reach a patch that would carry him. Doing this with all his strength, he grunted and groaned, wallowing through that paralysing flood like a human walrus, while his breast froze, his violent breathing spouted jets of vapour and the chill struck ever nearer his heart. Were he to cease wallowing he must stiffen and die.

Keego and the others were moving cautiously out testing the ice with the poles they had cut. One went through and the Grees halted. Then Keego ran back, tied two portage straps together making a forty-foot length, jumped on the remaining toboggan and lashed at the team. Sulkily they obeyed, stepping gingerly, baying to those on the far shore. Keego drove them on the up-stream side from Angus, halted them thirty feet away and threw his line. Angus caught and wrapped it round a numb arm.

Now at a shout the dogs started again, scrambling, scraping with sharp iron-black claws. Angus, stretching himself flat, gave a jerk; he slid up and out over the splintering edge. The dogs, quickening speed, darted for the land, towing him on his face, whipping him along, a half-frozen, half-sodden bulk, to the fringe of snow beneath a deep clay bank where Keego helped him to his feet. He could not speak, and stood panting, gulping strong rum.

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"Now walk," said the Indian gruffly, "walk—and walk fast."

This being wisdom, they set out, but Angus could not feel the ground, and his feet seemed a long way off. Soon they came to a beaten trail that must lead to the fort, so they followed that.

He was now armour-clad, not conscious of any wind, for wind cannot penetrate ice, but at knees and arm-pits there were joints in his heavy casing that scored and cut at the flesh with every step. His beard had frozen to his breast, carved as it were from the same crystal block; his expanding chest came against the rigidity enclosing him, his breath grew shorter and he felt his vital forces begin to yield.

He was nearly done when the trail twisted and he saw the fort's high stockade. Keego, running ahead, hammered at the gate with the small axe always carried at his belt. In the night silence it was like a series of shots.

A man in a fur helmet put his head over the bastion, parapet, and Angus could see the head outlined sharp against the sky. How well guarded, he thought, were these Canadians.

"*Holla, holla ! qui va là ?*" came a startled voice.

Angus could hardly speak, but Keego gave a shout, explaining in Cree what had happened. The head vanished. Next a small peep-hole opened in the gate at the height of a man's eyes, and a horn lantern threw out a faint gleam. It fell direct on Keego's wild face. There was an instant of pause—an exclamation.

"*Nom de Dieu !* It is the old bastard Keego himself! Keego, you have come to the wrong place."

The peep-hole slammed shut, the head reappeared

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above, the barrel of a rifle protruded, and Angus caught his breath.

"I am a white man," he croaked, "I have been in the river—I want shelter."

"From where do you come?"

"From York Factory—tell your bourgeois. We journey west—open the gate."

"*Un Anglais!*" There was a laugh from above.

"*Alors* go back to your river or continue your journey.

My bourgeois has no friends in York Factory, and that Keego is known to us. If he stays I shoot him.

Marche—marche!" he spoke as one does to dogs, the rifle jumping to his shoulder. He squinted over it.

"*Marche!*"

Angus, saying not a word, turned away; the smell of the place was in his nostrils, the warmth within its walls mocked him; then and there he swore a great oath.

Motioning to Keego, he dragged on another quarter-mile, halting in thick bush. Here they made two long fires eight feet apart, laid brush between them, and there he stood with bright drops trickling from his solid beard till his clothing grew soft. Presently it began to steam, and he stripped naked. Thus surrounded by leaping flame, he resembled a human salamander with the whiteness of his muscular body a sort of alabaster against the brick-brown of face and hands, while snow tumbled in a constant rain from the dark barricade of trees, the dogs gulped frozen fish that Keego tossed to them, and the other Crees brought in green boughs on which all would sleep.

Then Angus, the hot blood once more leaping through him, pulled on warm thick underclothing and

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waited till trows and tunic were nearly dry. But for the rest of that evening he spoke not at all.

Through deep forests swung the spare figure of Gheezis, The Sun, leaving a winding trail into which fresh snow crumbled softly. He limped a little, but that was an old story and did not affect his speed; his brows and faint moustache were thick with frost. On his back a pack, at his waist a small axe and one of the new steel traps he had bought on credit at York Factory the summer before. He wore caribou leggings bound above the knee, a caribou shirt, warm, light and loose, and his capote was of lynx skin.

Marking some fine prints that led to a hollow log, he put on mittens scented with the glands of beaver and fox, and set the trap just below snow-level, anchoring its light toggle chain to the middle of a six-foot pole that he also buried. Immediately above the trap he laid a small square of birch bark, paper-thin, dusted this with snow, and then obliterated all signs of his work with the gentle brushing of a wing of a blue crane that he always carried. Finally he scattered a few fragments of meat, and when he had finished one might tell that a man had passed this way but no more.

Continuing his round he found a writhing marten caught by the paw in another trap, and put his foot on it, pressing down till the writhing ceased. Freeing a slack brown body he stuffed it in the pack. Now turning homeward he distinguished a new trail but recently made. Pausing here he lit his pipe, and made out that there had passed within two hours six men, two of whom were white, with two toboggans and perhaps

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twelve dogs ; as to the dogs he could not be quite sure, but certainly there were not less than ten, and by the shape and webbing of the shoes he knew about where those had been made. Following on, he first smelled wood-smoke, then caught voices and a yellow pointed flame not far from his hunting-lodge. The strangers had camped before finding it.

In a thicket and against a wall of rock were seated two whites and some Indians he did not know, around them lay eleven dogs in little circular pits formed by the warmth of their bodies. The whites had stretched a single sheet of canvas in front of the fire. The dogs set up a clamour as Gheezis approached ; the Indians whipped them to silence, and one of the whites said :

"Allo, friend, sit down—eat—got any fur?"

Gheezis nodded, sat and ate his fill without speaking, his eyes busy ; he had not seen any of these people before. Also he had fur, prime fur, this being his best season yet, but it was promised to the English at the Bay who had given him debt, so presently he explained this.

Bouché, for it was Bouché, only laughed : Gheezis could give the English the rest of his catch if he made any, and now sell what he already had. The argument was backed by a flask of yellow liquid, and at sight of it the hunter began to waver.

"Yours," said Bouché, "good, take it."

Gheezis with memories of many things put it to his lips, and his fortitude weakened at the taste. He drank again. Bouché lit his pipe, seeming to forget all about him, and certainly there was no hurry. Now the route to salt water next summer began to look very long, and the hunter felt that these strangers were good people

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to deal with, but, in the past he had always been honest about debt and wondered if he were quite wise.

"Your lodge near here?" said Bouché, jerking his thumb.

Gheezis nodded.

"Bring all your fur: we buy it, good price."

"English fur," protested the hunter weakly, reading the white man's expression and knowing that he was undone. Were they not six, he alone? After another drink he felt very important, staggered over to his lodge and returned with a bundle he had hidden in the snow just behind where none but himself could find it, but he was sober enough to observe that others had searched the place very lately. Then he cut the babeche binding.

Bouché and Neil looked pleased; there were many prime marten and mink, not many beaver, but enough of the finer stuff to mean high value, and this being English fur they welcomed it the more. Presently Neil made trade.

A little later they moved into the lodge, it being warmer there, making brush beds in opposite corners. In the middle under a hole in the log roof the fire crackled in a small pit lined with clay. No wind could reach here, and the smoke climbed straight. Near the fire lay Gheezis, and beside him some trade goods from Buffalo Lake. Outside, the dogs nibbled at the ice between their toes.

To-night, decided Bouché, they had travelled as far as was wise, and the route indicated by Macdonald would not bring them home much before the ice softened. It had been hard travelling, and till now there was but small reward; they found the English

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more alert than they expected and the savages less pliable. Such English posts as they passed were well guarded, and that company no less than the Canadians had sharpened their methods of trade. Perhaps, reflected Neil, they too had the news from Montreal.

For him the past weeks were educative ; he absorbed both French and Cree, his natural gift of observation served him well, the Indians admired his strength, and copying them he learned how to use it. There was practically no talk when on the trail, but at night he had long conversations with the guide when Bouché, who seldom referred to Macdonald, promised that Julie should come to Neil on their return and they would be married later. To-morrow, with the best take yet, they would start back.

Mamanouska, the Conjuror, walking slowly from the blazing post, felt the years heavy upon him, and his heart was full as a pool is full of fish that come up from the sea to spawn. In the past few hours he had lived too quickly and seen too much, he was strangely tired, and all the days that had gone seemed to be born again and arrange themselves in a sort of long procession just as the dim ranks of trees on the shores of Buffalo Lake drifted imperceptibly behind. It appeared that in the whole world no place now remained for him.

One thing he knew well, and never again would he be quite safe. Such of his people that survived this night would carry its tale with them, it would spread from lodge to lodge in the strong woods and out over the buffalo plains how Mamanouska, the Conjuror, incited Petaun, The Otter, to kill white men and steal

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and burn, and the whites would not forget that however they quarrelled over fur. Their scouts would have open ears, they would lay traps that old feet could not escape, so the only thing left was to keep travelling as long as one might.

Now his lonely thoughts turned to the daughter of Bouché's woman.

On the first night beside the new trail that was, he noted, getting no fresher, he made a small fire and sat for many hours wrapped in the beaver robe. He looked at his seamed face in the new copper-backed mirror, and hardly knew it; he played for a little while fashioning a miniature paddle with the new many-bladed knife, then hung it to his girdle in the medicine bag for which he had no further use. Though very weary he could not sleep, nor had he any hunger—only cold, and it was certain that he would soon die. There was no sound but a faint crackle, and presently the soft soughing swish when a white owl floated over his head on downy wings. Soon the great bird returned, ghost-like, cutting its liquid way between dark trunks, and settled on a branch close by. It blinked down on him with large, yellow, globular eyes.

Mamanouska, knowing it had been sent, gave welcome, for the owl was his totem or familiar spirit: often they had communed together, and always it said what must be done.

The fire dwindled, expired, a few flakes touched it and vanished, hours went by, and still the old man sat motionless. His spirit, deserting his body, was far away, in touch with invisible things. The beaver robe turned white with powdery sifting from above, small forest creatures slunk light footed over the snow, regarding

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him with bright curious eyes. The stars circled. The owl, launching itself again, signalled Ko-ko-ko-ho in soft flute-like tones. Dawn came.

In the half-light he got to his feet very stiffly, knowing that he would not see another sun rise, but this did not matter since he had been told what he must do and say, so with creaking joints he set out once more. In two hours he heard what might be a wolf-bark. It came again, and was not a wolf.

As the sun rose clear he found Julie, who had kindled a fire and was boiling tea. She gave a little cry, subdued the snarling dogs and hurried towards him. Again the beaver robe she knew so well.

"Mamanouska, is it you? Sit down, sit down and eat and rest, then sleep."

The old man made the sign of negation. "I will sleep soon, but not till I have spoken, and again there is little time."

"But the fort—what of the fort and my mother? I saw a great fire."

"There is no longer any fort, but I think your mother is with those that escaped," he replied dully; "some stood watching it burn when I came away, but many lay inside. Petaun is dead."

There was a silence: feeling somehow no surprise she stood, a smooth-skinned Stoic, searching the lined face and knew him for one who had not long to live. About her mother she yielded to a strange sensation; it was like losing some familiar object in the home but not much more, and far more did she shrink from the picture of what else had happened. That was hard to grasp. In one hour all was comfort and safety, in the next a kind of nakedness. It was for things that

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she now mourned, things that had cost so much, gleanings from Bouché's adventurous life, all treasured, all irreplaceable. Even the vision of Macdonald lying with his gory crown seemed to strike less deep. And if it had not been for this old man with the haunted eyes, wrapped in Macdonald's robe——!

"Mamanouska," she said gently, "tell me the rest some other time." She put scalding tea and food before him. "Now eat."

He ignored it. "I eat no more. I take the long journey with Petaun and the rest, but first there are words for you. Listen! I have dreamed a dream in which my Manitou spoke and told me to find you and say that two days from here is a place on the Mudjatick River where its waters, falling over a great smooth rock, are open all winter. Beside that rock is a stream flowing from the north-east, and that you will follow, then journeying quickly you will come at last to a lodge, and here in my dream I have seen two white men. One lies with blood on his face and the other is also wounded. Reaching that place you will know what to do."

"My father and——"

"That was not told me, only of the two men. I have spoken."

Something within her met something else that he seemed to radiate; she felt the unified power, and her wild blood responded to its force. The conjuror's eyes, narrowed to slits, held her; he had ceased to be an exhausted ancient ready for the end, and was just a voice, an influence she could not escape. She knew that she would obey.

"Mamanouska—tell me!"

Raising a bony hand in a gesture of farewell, he

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turned away : the sands of life had nearly run, but his figure was straight as he moved slowly beneath the burdened spruce and out of sight. Knowing that she would not follow he did not go far, but sat with his back against a tree, the robe over his head. He was quite content, and would shortly talk things over with Petaun.

At noon the skies clouded, turning grey, and fine flakes commenced to dance whirling from the north. By next morning he looked exactly like a snow-covered stump.

It is believed by many that the wilderness has a quality of its own, and in some strange fashion magnetizes the human particles that move in its great emptiness so that they are insensibly drawn together however remote may seem the possibility of a meeting : it is as though humanity, when in isolation, radiates invisible waves, communicating a mutual awareness, and these influences often bring about encounters that were they planned would fail of achievement.

So after many days' travel from the east, arduous days in which he saw little and heard less, Angus came upon the fresh tracks of Gheezis, The Sun, and a short half-hour later they joined those of other men who had journeyed from the west. After a brief study he asked Keego what these tracks might mean, for to him the prints were not clear.

"The man who travels alone is Gheezis who came to the Bay last summer, for one leg is the shorter," said the Cree confidently. "He has taken one mink—no—it is a marten, and there also has he set another trap, so his winter lodge is not far off. He is a good hunter

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and will have furs. Now he finds the other trail and stays to think. Also he has smoked—see where the muzzle of his gun has touched that tree. These others are from the interior, for their shoes are different, less long and more broad. Gheezis has no dogs with him; but these others have many with two toboggans, therefore they trade. I smell smoke and think they are not far off."

"Then it is our fur," said Angus stolidly, "and we will save Gheezis a trip."

"It is better," objected Keego, scenting possible conflict, "that one man stay here with our dogs to keep them quiet. Perhaps we shall not be welcome."

Angus grinned at him, then agreed, and they moved on in failing light. Canadians most likely, he thought, sliding his rifle from its caribou skin cover, and in that case he would certainly have something to say.

In ten minutes other dogs heard them and gave tongue, whereat Angus cursed, and pushing on came into a little glade where the ground was clear. Round it rose the dense forest wall, smoke climbed from a small white-roofed lodge, the snow was trampled by many feet, and near the lodge a nest of webbed shoes stood upright. On one side had been thrown together a brush shelter floored with spruce and here four Indians, blankets over their shoulders, stared blinking at the new-comers. Strange dogs sniffed at Angus's heels, the coarse tawny hair bristling along their spines; they were not Indians' dogs, he noted, being too well fed for that.

Now, twisting off his shoes, he made for the lodge with Keego looming formidably behind and jerked open the bark frame-work that served for a door. The

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first man he saw was Gheezis sprawled loosely on his back, eyes shut, mouth open, then a pile of fur beside a heap of trade goods. The smell of liquor came to him strongly. Stooping, for the door was low, he strode in. Now at the back of the lodge he perceived two other men just roused from sleep, leaning on their elbows. He did not know them. He kicked the fire, a tongue of flame leaped up, their faces came clear and he saw them to be whites. The situation flashed on him.

"Well," he said coldly, "who are you, and what is this?"

For a moment neither of them spoke, while Gheezis, his eyes rounding, gazed up at the stern face he knew well and laid a protective arm over the trade goods. He felt guilty and very frightened. Bouché with an exclamation made a movement towards his gun which stood in a corner, but the barrel of Keego's rifle suddenly protruded at Angus's side and the Frenchman drew back. The other man who was younger had not said a word; he just stared and stared.

"What do you here?" rasped Angus.

"M'sieu, we are about our business," Bouché's voice shook a little, and he was thinking hard.

"Who are you, and what business?" Angus, stooping, began to finger the fur: he had recognized Gheezis at once, and his blood was getting hot while his eyes grew colder than ever. Now he began to experience a sort of grim pleasure. "Your business is that of thieves—and yours too!" He turned savagely on the younger man who was, he decided, a Scot, but a renegade Scot badly needing a lesson. Another pair of grey eyes were meeting his own with just the same quality of steel, and he welcomed their defiance.

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"Your name?" demanded the young man.

"My name does not matter. I am from York Factory with orders to—" holding back rising fury he choked a little—"to take what is company fur wherever I may find it. I take this having given the savage debt for it last summer."

"You only say you take it,"—Neil shook his flaxen head and his tone was contemptuous—"but I have already done so for my bourgeois on Buffalo Lake."

"Then you are with the Canadians and have no business here. Get back to your thieving pack."

"When it suits us and not before," said Neil coolly. "Your authority for this?"

"The only one that carries on these waters." Angus's hand was not quite steady as he felt within his tunic and brought out Macnab's letter. "My name is there, read it, then travel."

Neil, without glancing at the sheet, tore it across, while Angus, hot with mounting wrath, noted the power of his big body.

"M'sieu," whispered Bouché, "m'sieu, be careful, there are many of them outside; it is wiser to give way and do nothing. What is a little fur?"

"This is a free country," countered the young man measuring his distance, "we have bought these pelts and they are ours. Your company may take what it can hold but no more. Keep back yon heathen butcher, and let this matter lie between you and me to settle."

"Ay," nodded Angus grimly, "let it lie."

At this Neil made a lunge forward, and in the same instant Bouché reached for his gun: his finger was on the trigger when Keego's rifle spoke and the guide

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reeled back helpless. At once the lodge was swimming in thick choking fumes while Angus, himself having no desire to kill, dropped his weapon to close with the young man in a sort of savage joy. This night he would be even with the Canadians.

"Leave him to me, Keego," he grunted.

The two met, grappled, and became locked, while Gheezis rolled over on his side and gazed with fascination at the white men battling for his fur. Keego, as commanded, stood apart, tall, sullen, menacing, with an eye on Bouché, who leaned bleeding against the flimsy wall. Outside the Indians were crowding to the doorway so that it framed dark faces whose wild gaze was alight. This was a white man's fight! Not before had they seen such a thing—always the white men had fought them.

The two powerful bodies swayed, so evenly matched in strength that for some moments neither yielded, neither had advantage. The older man, feeling his muscles creak, tried a wrestling grip unused since boyhood days in Argyle, only to have it broken by a trick that a later generation had learned among those same bleak hills. It was checkmate. Neil, remembering all his art, was baffled by sheer resistant force, while the other man opened a reservoir of effort that it amazed himself to discover.

Their breath came faster, bright beads of sweat coursed down their sunburnt faces, Cumberland tactics were now abandoned and each strove as for life, bone against bone, sinew against sinew. Gheezis, caught up in this absorbing spectacle, forgot about himself and his own predicament and had begun automatically to feed the fire with small dry sticks so that it illuminated the

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locked bodies and straining faces. Here was something he would remember for the rest of his days, and the tale of it would run from lodge to lodge. Keego, dismissing Bouché as needing no further attention, kept his eye on Angus, who now seemed to be failing. The sound of his sharp breathing increased; his lungs were bursting. An old man, for such the savage deemed him, could hardly defeat a young one unaided, and this young one was without doubt a great fighter. But had they only used axes instead of hands the difference were settled much more quickly.

At last Neil drove his elbow under Angus's chin, forcing the head back. Angus's cheeks turned purple, his eyelids fluttered and there came a sound of strangling. At this Keego gave a grunt, his rifle swung up and its butt descended on the flaxen head. Neil swayed, lifting both hands. His knees gave way.

"Good," grunted Keego, "good fight—white man very strong—you all right?"

Angus was too busy catching his breath and did not speak. Steadying himself, he moved uncertainly to the door, where the dark faces melted away, and stood gulping in cold fresh air, blinking at the peaceful stars, feeling life flooding back into a sorely tried body. He was rather proud of himself, though victory lay not with him; there was paid, at any rate, part of his account against the Canadians, and he wondered were there others of this sort in the district. But Macnab would welcome that fur and it was worth looking at again.

His glance strayed to the sprawling figure still stretched insensible, and Bouché, round whose shoulder his neckcloth was tied, crouched on his knees, muttering.

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"M'sieu, it is murder, your savage has killed him."

Angus felt a sudden pang of anxiety and also knelt. The youth was limp, his breast did not stir, the cheeks had turned grey; a gout of blood clotted on his forehead and his eyes were closed. Lying thus, he looked far too young to die and Angus grew deeply troubled.

Loosing his shirt he exposed a pillar of neck and throat: there was a faint motion here, a sort of delicate flutter signalling that the lamp still burned however weakly. Round the neck was a thin cord. Angus sent Bouché a questioning glance, but the guide did not speak, so he pulled gently on the cord and exposed the silver cross. Turning the small shining thing in a hard palm, his hand began to shake, and at this moment Gheezis, absorbed in what was going on, reached for another dry stick. A tongue of flame illuminated the inscription, and Angus groaned.

"What is it?" said Keego mystified.

Angus's face was blank: leaning closer over the young man he saw that the eyes were now a little opened and he seemed to be close to death. He looked up at the bearded features, gave his lips a wry twist and tried to move. This being ineffectual, he blinked, frowned weakly, and regarded the stranger with faint curiosity.

"Your name is—is Neil Campbell?" whispered Angus, bending still nearer.

The young man gave the slightest perceptible nod.

"I did not know, laddie, I did not know. Tell me of your mother?"

There was no answer, and the eyes closed again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BROWN BITCH

AN hour passed, and Bouché, having stanchèd his own blood, watched the bearded giant who sat motionless as a stump and did not speak : when spoken to he did not answer, nor would he allow the guide to touch his companion, for it appeared that Neil was very slowly winning back to life. His breathing grew less tremulous, his cheeks began to lose something of their ashen hue. The three whites now had the lodge to themselves ; Gheezis had thankfully disappeared, and when ejected was not allowed to touch either the fur or his goods. All white people, he concluded, were mad, especially these. Near by, Keego's men had built a fire and were squatting beside it with two inland Crees from Buffalo Lake ; there was no animosity between them and they discussed the present strange affair from every angle. Keego's fourth man had come up with the teams so that the secluded glade was animated by the presence of nine savages and seventeen dogs. Kettles of fish, rabbits and the skinned carcasses of mink and marten stewed over the fire ; there was tea and tobacco. The immediate present had been provided for ; no problems remained for the *engagés*, and the whites might quarrel as they chose. Keego, expanding in this fraternity, began to talk of his journey

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to the very far north, how he met a tribe that made hatchets and knives and pots from the copper they found in rocks near the Far Away Metal River, where there were no trees, and how the small brown people were speared in their sleep by the Dogribs.

"There is much fur in that country," he concluded, "and but few that try to take it. Some day I go back."

Gheezis, looking thoughtful, crushed a rabbit bone and sucked it. With the fruit of three months' trapping lost, he was in low spirits; his credit at York Factory had been ruined, and he would be glad never to see Angus again. Also the English were evidently stronger than other white traders, who for their part also would not trust him. Furthermore, the youngest white man was surely about to die, which might be very awkward for himself when this affair became known, and now it seemed that the wise thing would be to get clean away from his customary trapping-ground to start again in a new country. So in a guileless fashion he drew the bombastic Keego on to further talk about his northern paradise, and by putting a few searching questions learned in a short while all there then was to be learned. When it seemed that the stream of information was drying up, he began to harness his dogs.

"Where are you going?" asked Keego, mildly interested.

"To see the rest of my traps and kill fresh meat."

Working his toes under the straps, he moved off as quietly as a dry leaf floats downstream. The forest swallowed him, and the men from the Bay were left with Bouché's inland Crees.

"He was afraid to stay," said Keego with a shrug.

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"and presently will camp a long way from here, but perhaps he is wise. Where do you come from?"

"Buffalo Lake," replied Bouché's leader, "where we are about to return."

"With one dying man and one wounded!" The tone was dry. "And what story will you yourselves tell when you get there?"

"Bouché will tell it."

"But if he also dies on the way which is likely?"

At this they were struck with sudden alarm. Everything seemed out of joint, their leaders were defeated, it was quite true that Bouché might also die and they themselves not be believed. Picturing Macdonald as they knew him that seemed more than probable, and suddenly the future loomed black.

"It is not my business," continued Keego craftily, "but you can do one of two things; you may go back with your story to your bourgeois or else go not at all, and for myself I think that is safer. Why not therefore take what you need and travel perhaps to Lake Athabasca instead, where your women may join you later?"

The Crees, yielding to this treatment, and now thoroughly frightened, glanced at each other with apprehension. It was all quite true, and should they return Macdonald might well brand them as traitors and deserters and act accordingly.

"But you, what will you say when asked of this affair?"

"Only that you were taken by surprise and did your best but were too few."

That was enough, and before break of day more dogs were silently harnessed with still no sound from the lodge, and they slipped away with one toboggan, after

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which Keego's men slept with blankets pulled over their faces. Keego himself only sat and smoked and smiled. How much simpler, he thought, had he made things for his own master.

At grey of dawn Neil sighed, moved, opened his eyes: dull pain throbbed in his skull, his body felt like lead, his brain struggled with shadows of a dream in which—in which——! Bouché, weak and exhausted, slept in his corner, and beside the fire sat the great bulk of the man from the Bay. Slowly the thing came back; the trade goods and fur were where he last had seen them, for the rest there was just a low mutter of fire and silence.

The big man had turned at his movement and was gazing at him earnestly.

"You are Neil Campbell?" said he heavily.

"That's my name."

"You wouldn't be recognizing your own father, would you?"

Of course, that couldn't be true, so Neil put it aside and lay feeling the life pulse back to his aching body. When he pressed his hand to his head it came away sticky. He glanced towards Bouché whose noisy breathing could be heard, and tried to rebuild the dream, but could only recall that it had something to do with his mother—someone asking about his mother. Grey eyes again encountered grey eyes, and at something in the other man's face he shrank a little. It couldn't be true.

"You—you my father?"

"I am, God help me." There was no answer, and Angus leaned towards him, then paused. "How's your mother, lad?"

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"Dead."

Angus groaned and bent his head. Now Bouché gave a broken sigh and his legs began to twitch; he rolled over and lay on his side, eyes open, about to speak, but Neil lifted a hand for silence.

"How long dead?" asked Angus in a hollow voice.

"A year ago." Then bitterly: "What matter to you?"

Angus shook himself like a dog as though trying to shake something off. "Is that true?"

"Ay, it's true."

"What of, lad?"

"The pain in her breast; they found it was eating the breast away but could do nothing, and she wouldn't give in. Then it took her. But what matters that to you?"

Bouché listened to them with amazement: it seemed that here was a son, returning from the edge of death, talking to a father who had nigh killed him about a dead mother, and he examined Angus with sudden extraordinary interest: that thick hair now grizzling had once been flaxen, the body had the same blocky shape as the son's, the eyes were the same, both had the same long arms, strong face and square chin. Here indubitably were father and son, and now the son was sitting up regarding his father in a manner to be remembered.

"Let us forget the rest, and settle this. And I ask what matters it to you who left her to fend for herself. Year after year she wrote to you with never a letter answered, so after a while she stopped writing and your name never passed her lips again. She was trying to persuade herself that you were dead, but could learn

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nothing of that. By God, Angus Campbell of Appin, I want no such father as you. 'Twas your going away that killed her."

There was no reply, no emotion showed on the granite features, and Bouché marvelled the more; his wound was hurting grievously, but he hardly felt it. Then, lifting his head, the older man drew a long breath.

"Neil Campbell, you have had your say, so let that matter lie between you and me: now I take you and this Frenchman to the Canadian fort which is three days' journey."

"You take us!"

"Ay, you will be better there."

"Were I dying of thirst I would take no sup of water from you—father."

He flung out the last word like a stone, and Angus recoiled at its contempt; then, harshly:

"If that is your choice I say no more; but you and this man when he can walk will leave this district and return to it at your peril."

Neil laughed in a manner that made Bouché shiver, and felt for his father that strange irrational antipathy which is sometimes the result of consanguinity.

"For the rest of it," went on Angus in a voice like ice, "you are trespassers, you have no business here and I confiscate your goods."

"But, m'sieu," broke in Bouché horrified, "you cannot do that."

"No? Then we shall see." Angus straightened his great frame and stepped to the door.

"Keego! Keego, come here!"

The Cree put a pinch of snow into his pipe that

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nothing be wasted, and Angus looking about saw but five men instead of ten.

"Where is Gheezis?" he asked, puzzled.

"Being much afraid he went away; he will not come back."

"And these others that were with the Canadians?"

"They have gone to kill fresh meat and return soon," lied Keego, fluently. "When the Canadian hunters come back they will wait here till the Frenchman can walk, when they all go to Buffalo Lake."

"It is well, but without their trade goods and the fur: we ourselves start at once for the Nelson River."

Keego, nodding, followed him into the lodge; he had picked up the bundle of skins and was turning away when with a swift motion he thrust his master aside. In the same instant came a deafening report; Angus twisted round like a great cat and saw Bouché on one knee, his eyes large and round, a smoking rifle in his hands. At this the big man made one stride forward, snatched the gun, broke it like a stick across his thigh, and reaching for the corner shattered Neil's weapon in the same fashion. In the space of a few seconds it was all over, and Bouché, seeing the man's face gave a cry of fear.

He need not have feared: Angus did not even trouble to look at him, but sent Neil one strange almost wistful look as though acquitting him of this business, then turned a broad back and walked out.

Presently the voice of straining dogs died in the distance, and Bouché gazed at the broken guns with a sense of unreality.

"M'sieu."

"Well."

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"That—that was your father?"

Neil picked up the torn letter, put its halves together, and read :

"To whom this may concern. The bearer, Angus Campbell, chief clerk of this company at this establishment of York Factory, has my authority to expel from areas chartered to this company all traders and guides found there and not being in our service, and to confiscate such trade goods and fur as may be in their possession. All post managers are enjoined to give him such assistance as he may ask.

"Signed by me—JOHN MACNAB,

"Chief Factor, Hudson's Bay Company."

Neil folded the sheet, putting it in his pocket. "Ay, it was my father."

"*Nom de Dieu*," breathed the Frenchman, "*quel père ! Quelle famille*."

Neil gave a strange smile, for to him there had been something oddly natural about this encounter with a long-vanished parent. They met, they clashed, they fought, then parted without any suggestion of reconciliation, each wondering how and when the next meeting would be, each with the conviction that somehow it would have much the same colour. There had been no real regrets on either side ; antagonism burned in the blood they shared, and there was a hard mutual satisfaction that it should be so. The last time Neil saw his father, Angus had tossed him on his shoulder, where he sat, shouting, a small hand gripping a thatch of sandy hair. Now he had broken his father's back were it not for the rifle butt of Keego, and it was queer

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to find himself stronger than the giant he had once worshipped. There the matter stood, and he experienced a drab satisfaction in the thought that his mother was dead.

"Let us forget my father," he said brusquely, "take off your shirt."

Bouché winced as he drew the gory thing over his head and exposed an ugly hole through the big muscle running from neck to shoulder. A shade lower had meant a shattered bone, but the wound though painful was not dangerous and had now ceased to bleed. "*Eh bien ?*" he asked, turning his head. "What do you think of it? There is nothing broken?"

"No, and you got off cheaply: you'll have a stiff left arm for a while, but no more. Bouché, why did you try to shoot?"

"That big Indian, did he not shoot me first, and did not this strange father of yours try to kill you?"

"No, nor did he approve of the shooting, also a third man should not take part in a family difference."

"*Mon Dieu*, a difference, you call it that!"

"Ay, just that over a bit of fur, and your mistake cost us two guns."

"It does not matter, there are more with the *engagés*. *Alors*, m'sieu, what do we do next?"

"I was thinking of that."

"Then for myself I shall be glad to obey your father and leave this country, but what will the bourgeois say?"

"That does not trouble me. How soon can you travel?"

"I shall be able to-morrow, and am anxious to see my *petite* Julie." He moved to the door, glanced at

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the trampled snow, then at the sky which was dull, soft, with no bite in the air, and what little wind there was now came from the south. "M'sieu," he said, frowning, "the weather changes and I do not like it. To-morrow I think we shall not go far."

"Why?"

"I think there will be rain, also I wish that those Indians of ours might return. You will observe that your father has left us but little to eat."

Bouché was right, for that day there set in all over the interior one of the great thaws that at long intervals violate the seasonal order of the north: it was strange, unnatural and contradictory. The snow-buried land, now settled to winter sleep, was roused by mild airs that had no real place in its oblivion, and clouds that should have scattered more snow wept an outrageous rain. Trees divested themselves of a fleecy burden, and by nightfall were glazed with an icy skin so that their naked branches seemed dipped in liquid diamonds. The earth blanket, now sodden, lost its whiteness and took on a pale blue-grey tint as it sank and shrank. Rock surfaces, rough with lichen, suddenly exposed themselves to the strange warmth, pools widened on the glare ice of manacled streams, and where water ran fast it dissolved its chains and bubbled in freedom.

Now too the forest population was deranged. Black bears in drowsy dens put out their noses, sniffed and rolled their wedge-shaped heads, then took tentative journeys, ploughing deep furrows as they went. Moose that had yarded in deep hemlock-thickets for the winter dispersed and wandered about, crashing in early morning through the night crust, for at night a skin of crust formed over the snow, while out on the Barrens where

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the skin stayed, millions of caribou unable to reach the moss on which they lived weakened and died.

On the third day came gripping frost, once more the earth tightened and hardened, the late sun struck with blinding reflection on a land coated with ice, and winter returned to the *pays d'en haut*.

It was in this brilliance that Julie, journeying up a shining river saw ahead of her five men and two toboggans coming towards her and travelling fast. Halting her dogs she waited, while long-deferred hope rose in her breast.

So many weary miles she had travelled since Mamanouska bade farewell. Over Pelican Lake, then east keeping north of the Churchill—that was the general direction Bouché had told her—but those she met had seen nothing of him. Day after day she pushed on, living by her gun; night after night she camped in solitude. In native lodges where she found welcome there was no word, and to none of them had yet come the news of Buffalo Lake; always she preceded the arrival of that story, and caution bade her keep silent concerning it. But the punishment of this search was growing too great, and though her body remained strong, her courage had begun to falter.

Now the figures grew nearer; they were not the ones she longed for but those of five Crees, of whom the leader, a big man with a long scar on his cheek was a stranger. He looked at her hard.

"Good day," he said.

Julie nodded: the man's expression repelled her, but she put in his own tongue the question she always asked. Had he heard anything of two white men—

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she described them—travelling in this country with four inland Crees.

"Who are you?" he asked, suddenly alert.

She told him.

"Where do you go now?"

"To seek my father as I have told you. You know something?"

Keego's black eyes narrowed a little. There was but little time to think, for Angus with the other toboggan was only a mile behind; but here stood the daughter of the Frenchman he had shot, and who would certainly shoot him when opportunity offered. That thought had begun to move suggestively in his mind, he did not question it, and now that it was over the whole affair had become discomforting. Nor could he be sure just how he stood with Angus who had not even thanked him for disposing of the young Canadian, and since then developed a morose manner, often not speaking for hours. Nor could Keego tell how chief factor Macnab would take the matter when it was reported. It seemed therefore quite clear that he must avoid all Canadian posts, at any rate for a long time to come, and it might be even wiser to rid himself of the whole business and follow Gheezis to the far north. Also how much better if this girl never found her father.

"I know nothing," he said dully, "but here is my master."

Now Angus came up: it was strange, he thought, to find a half-breed girl travelling alone in this country, but being in a dour condition he said nothing.

"M'sieu," she began urgently, though a little awed by the harshness of his face, "this man will not speak, but can you help me? I search for my father, Louis

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Bouché, and his companion, Neil Campbell, who travelled through this country from Buffalo Lake with four Crees."

There was a moment of silence, while Keego stared hard..

"Canadians?" Angus's tone was flat and his eyes had hardened.

"Yes."

"Then what do they in this district?"

"I cannot say, only that they were sent weeks ago."

"Then they are trespassers,"—here he paused giving her a strange look—"and no doubt in search of fur that is not theirs as probably you know well."

"I know nothing, m'sieu," she pleaded, "nothing."

"Is it so important that you find them?"

"But yes, yes,"—she caught at his arm—"I must find them."

"Well, I can tell you that they are returning to Buffalo Lake."

"Then you have seen them! Now I must tell you that there is no longer any fort to return to, but they do not know this; it was taken by the Crees and destroyed and burned, the bourgeois was killed, also the chief of the Crees with many more, and of the few who escaped I am one. Where the others are I do not know, and must find my father."

"When did this happen?"

"It was on the night of *La Nouvelle Année*."

"Then I have no doubt that your bourgeois earned what he got," said Angus callously. "What is his name?"

"Macdonald, m'sieu; but of these others the young man had yellow hair—and, and——"

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"And what?"

"I shall soon marry him. I beseech you—tell me."

At this Angus jerked up his chin and the grey eyes bored into her. "You—you marry him?"

"Yes, but that is not anything to you. Why will you not tell me, what have I done to you?"

"Nothing, you have done nothing—yet. The two you seek—" here he hesitated a moment while Keego's intense gaze fixed on him—"the two you seek are now on their way to the interior. This is the Mudjatick River. Follow it till you see a smaller one coming in from the north, it is still open and falls over a great smooth rock, and on that one you will find their camp, and from it their trail. The soft weather will delay them and they will not have started till to-day. That is all, except that they have arms and meat."

Her heart filled with relief. "M'sieu, I do not know who you are, and at last you are kind, but why could you not tell me this at once? *Marche! Marche!*"

She was gone like the wind: he watched the slight figure as it dwindled towards a bend in the river, then turned savagely on Keego.

"This affair is not yet over, and what you have heard me say that you will forget. Is it understood?"

Keego nodded: he was more than ready to forget unless the time might come when he could use it to his own advantage, and for the rest of that day he watched his master with growing uneasiness. A single word from this man would condemn him, and again how much safer did the girl never find her father. He had been thunderstruck on hearing the fate of Buffalo Fort because he had known Petaun in days past, and felt assured that for that massacre many a Cree would pay

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heavily. Now round his pagan soul in which suspicion was always stirring gathered a multitude of crowding fears, and that night he sat long by the fire after the others slept, around him the wilderness was a sort of crystal fairy-land, the trees, like chandeliers under the moon, tinkling delicately in a light wind. The snow was glazed so that it retained no imprints of small furry feet, and sloped smoothly to a river once again man-acled. Its crust would carry a man without shoes, but not moose or caribou, and in the distance he could hear a slow heavy crunch as some big beast sank through it at every plunging step.

At any other time he had taken his gun and set out, but to-night he felt unnatural, and the new fears awakened a few hours ago had him in their grip. Since then Angus had hardly looked at him; he only made a gesture when he decided to camp, so it was evident that the grim understanding that once existed between them had been broken.

Also, reflected Keego, he had overreached himself and made a liar out of his master, and in his experience white men did not lie to each other, ever; they might fight, but not lie. Angus, as he told the daughter of the Frenchman, believed that the hunters of those other two were returning with fresh meat, but Keego knew that they had been left with neither guns nor meat, which unpardonable thing would lie at the door of his master and himself, so from every angle it seemed much wiser to leave these parts as soon as he might and take the girl with him.

Putting on his wolf-skin helmet, he took his pack from a toboggan, slung his shoes over his shoulder, and moved off as silently as an otter floats downstream.

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A few miles farther on he smelled smoke, a little later he caught the whimper of a dog that dreamed in its sleep, then not far from the bank flickered a small red eye. At this he laid aside pack and shoes, and still grasping the musket climbed the bank further back to approach against what little wind there was, and lest the crust should not carry him he sank on hands and knees. Doubtless the girl slept. He intended no present violence, but would just take and keep her in the way of his people.

Julie did not sleep ; she was lying on a mattress of brush, feeding the fire, her eyes restless, a great weariness in her body. She was trying to believe that the long search would soon end, and pictured herself again in the arms of those she loved. Always this vision and this alone had supported her ; it helped to obliterate thought of Buffalo Lake, and indeed that grim affair had by now taken on some of the quality of a dream ; it seemed to have happened on the other side of a world filled with emptiness and snow, across which she journeyed for years to no avail.

In her brief meeting with the bearded man whom she knew must be with the English, she had said no more than was wise, well aware what had taken Bouché and her lover so far to the east. He had been a strange one, that man, never before had she met anyone like him, and she felt that he knew far more than he chose to tell ; he had made her wonder even more anxiously how her own men had fared, how they would take her news, and to what fort of the Norwesters would they turn now. There was but one thing of which she could be quite sure—life had changed for them all.

Drowsiness came over her, and she was pulling up her

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blanket when a slight sound filtered in, distinguishable from the small wild voices she knew so well. Her instinct signalled that she was not alone, so instantly she threw snow on the small fire, and as it spluttered and died the surrounding forest sprang into clearer view, the familiar assembly of naked trunks and glittering branches. Then a cloud drifted from the face of the moon, and between these trunks she saw something lying dark across the snow. It looked like the elongated shadow of a beast. Immediately her training took control, and what followed was automatic: she was not aware of any fear and, instinct still at work, she remained motionless except that her brown hand crept slowly towards the musket that lay ready primed beside her. For one moment, one precious moment, she knew that the thing, man or beast whichever it might be, could not see her since shadows cannot see, and before it changed shape she lay flat on the brush, herself a formless part of the earth, the rifle-butt snug against her prone shoulder, her cheek cuddling its smooth stock. Lying thus, she heard an Arctic owl give soft salute to the moon, and away to the north the echo of what might have been the stroke of an axe. At this her heart leaped.

Then by deliberate inches there projected the sharp snout and pointed ears of a grey wolf.

Julie, holding the gun-stock a shade closer, pressed its trigger; the explosion roared through the frozen stillness, her dogs set up an angry clamour, and Keego, The Fish, toppled forward with a bullet-hole between his eyes.

At midnight Bouché sat in the lodge of Gheezis

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sucking hard at his pipe ; he looked dejected and the hole in his shoulder muscle stung like fire.

" M'sieu, it is as I said and I am now persuaded that those cursed hunters will never return here for it is already two days since they left. Also when one hunts one travels light, but, as we have observed, these men take all, leaving nothing. Certainly they have deserted."

Neil regarded the two broken guns and gave a shrug ; he was a little tired of this continuous harping on a fact only too evident, but it remained to be faced, and to wait here any longer would be senseless. He had recovered from Keego's attack, the guide was nearly himself again with his wound healing fast, and were there but a little good food in his belly he could stand a forced march. Food however was low, the ice-bound wilderness revealed no rabbit runs so it was useless to set snares, the cold had become intense, and the two were practically marooned in a sort of gigantic skating rink with no weapons to kill flesh or feather.

" Bouché, in the morning we get out of this : how far is it to the nearest fort of our people ? "

" It may be one hundred miles. M'sieu, I ask myself did your father then desire that we starve ? "

" He did not," said Neil harshly, " but like ourselves performed what he thought his duty, for which I do not blame him. Would you not have done the same ? "

" That is possible, but perhaps not quite in the same way."

" I believe you," grinned Neil, " nor could he know that our men would not return, so that must be Keego's doing."

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"Myself, some day with much pleasure I shall kill that man," said Bouché softly. "*Mon Dieu*, but I should like again to see Buffalo Lake and even that old bourgeois of ours. Your father, he took all our liquor, yes?"

"Ay, as we would have taken his were we able. Forget the liquor."

"M'sieu, you two are alike in so many things; if you had his beard and——"

He stopped, for suddenly there came from the south the faint distant report of a gun. At this he sprang to his feet his face brightening.

"La! La! Perhaps I talk too fast. Is it that the heart of your father has become soft?"

Neil shook his head. "That is not my father."

"*Alors*, let us hope it is someone whose blood is more warm." He went out, stood listening tensely, then sent a long clear Holla through the still air: a moment later sounded another report, and in such time as it takes one to reload, a third. At this Bouché gave a yelp of joy.

Half an hour later they heard dogs and a strong young voice urging them on.

In later days when recalling that meeting Neil always wondered that it should have been so calm; there was Julie racing ahead of her dogs, Julie's arms round Bouché's neck, Bouché wincing under the caress, a long long look, half-shy, half-passionate at himself—and that was all. Perhaps death had come too near to each of them for any further demonstration, and as they talked and ate, it was rather a feeling of indirection that possessed them; in the middle of speech they would stop to look at each other in a sort of bewilderment as though

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all the fixed points of life had been obliterated, and in a strange way their two tales seemed to effect a kind of balance and off-set each other, leaving an odd vacuum not easily filled.

That meeting was harder on the others than on Neil for he had lost but little and made reunion with the one he loved, but Bouché's eyes dimmed with tears as he listened to the tale of Buffalo Lake, to the prophesy and passing of Mamanouska. For his woman somehow he did not feel so deeply. True that twenty years ago she had saved his life, but actually they had little in common, and she was still a silent savage no less so than when she bore him a child in a skin-covered teepee. Her life with him had made no real mark on her, and now she would be back with her own people, he was able to persuade himself of this, and though he had never revealed it to Julie the woman in recent years had grown deeply jealous of her own daughter. But to lose one's home and the savings of half a lifetime that would later on have meant retirement to a life of ease in Canada, that was a graver matter.

Neil also had surprisingly little he cared to tell. Now that the tension was over he experienced a sort of savage loyalty to his father that he did not in the least understand, but its roots went deep and he vowed that whatever the provocation had been he would not depreciate his own blood. A great division was established and must always exist, he now felt that the resentment he had harboured for years since his father's desertion was more than justified; he had suffered and was determined to square the account; never could father and son be to each other what they might in happier case, and there came back to him something that McGillvray, Fraser

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or someone had said to him at Lachine about spoiling his father's business.

All this was true, but to-day the boot was on the other foot; his father had done the spoiling, and the young man conceived for him a secret but genuine admiration that mixed oddly with his anger and seemed just as natural. It was strange that it should be so, he reflected, when before there was only contempt. Perhaps it had something to do with that last queer wistful look from his father at the lodge door.

Bouché obviously could never comprehend this: to him the encounter would always be vivid and it appealed to his Gallic fancy. The way in which he glanced at Neil and murmured to himself was unmistakable, the story was too novel to be forgotten, and Neil imagined it filtering through the strong woods where men talked by their camp-fires and made hazards about the next meeting of these two.

The young man would have been glad to know what his father now felt, perhaps, he thought, a little sorry for what had happened and a little less relentless or he would not have directed Julie to this spot, so the son was the more anxious to keep Julie in ignorance of their relationship, and so often as he saw the truth hanging on Bouché's lips he signalled for silence. The real issue of the affair was yet to come.

As to Keego, the two nodded instant approval when Julie described what had taken place that night, the wolf-skin helmet and white scar on his cheek. Bouché, full of love and admiration patted her arm, complimented her shooting and regretted that he himself had not been able to settle with the Cree. Keego might lie where he was till the ivory-beaked ravens picked his

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bones. Her account of it was so cool and measured that Neil wondered if this could be the same girl who once shed tears merely because he treated her with common courtesy.

There was no love-making that day in the lodge of Gheezis, The Sun, for now had come the hour of decision, so the two talked long and earnestly while Julie, her future also in the balance, hung on every word.

"*Mon vieux*," said Neil, "you and I are under contract and it is our duty to return if not to Buffalo Lake then to the other Macdonald on Lake Ile a la Crosse who is a better bourgeois than ours. There I will make a statement of all that has happened and we both sign it."

"M'sieu," demurred the guide, "I am under your orders, yes, but listen to me. Why should we return to Ile a la Crosse. For myself, half of my life, twenty years, yes, I have lived in that hard country and it is more than enough. My house she is burned; my gun she is broke; my woman she is lost, and now where I sleep there is my home. Suppose we go back to this other Macdonald as you say then we do just the same old thing over again, and remembering Petaun I do not think that many of those savages will desire to trade at Ile a la Crosse; they will be too frightened, they will go elsewhere."

"Which is not our affair," said Neil bluntly.

"*Eh bien*," persisted Bouché doggedly, "consider this; so long as we make some report to some bourgeois of the company that is all right. Very well! For a long time now I hoped to move not farther west but towards Canada and out of the strong woods, then after

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a while when again I make some saving perhaps to Trois Rivières, so now m'sieu, let us go east not west. Eh, *ma petite*, what do you think?"

Julie could see it only in one way. Beneath an outward calm, the inheritance from an impassive mother, she was shaken. For the very first time she had made acquaintance with fear: too many grim images were burdening her memory, existence of life had been too bitter, and with an ardour sharpened by stress she longed for something happier and better. Looking back, it seemed that in the flames of Buffalo Lake all the old barriers so long insurmountable had been burned away, and over their ruins the vision of a sweeter life hung clear.

Her thoughts of Neil had, too, undergone a change, her understanding of herself seemed clarified by night after lonely night in the wilderness, and now she admitted that she was at the best but half-tamed, and all she stood able to contribute was the instinctive passion of love that once she had assumed would be sufficient to hold her man. But to-day she realized that that was not sufficient: she wanted to know more, to have more qualities for the other kind of life which would make her more of his equal; there were a thousand things she aspired to absorb on his behalf, the kind of thing not expected of a country wife whose duties were but to feed and satisfy the body. How wonderful it would then be to love and be loved.

Listening to the two men talk, and it had been a long talk, exploring the two faces she held most dear, she had no doubts for herself were she given the chance, and all this was tumbling about in her agile brain when Bouché turned to her.

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"*Alors, petite*, we are three of us here together—what do you think in this matter?"

It was put with a smile and the gates opened; it all came out in a rush, her bright gaze turning from one to the other. Her soul was in what she said, and there was no word of the debt these two owed to her, so, listening, Neil felt something profound that he had not known before, and vowed that whatever came of it he would love her to the end. But Bouché, smiling again only nodded.

"*Bien, m'sieu*, you have heard. Do we then travel to the east?"

Neil nodded, aware of delight in the dark eyes.

"Yes, I agree; we make for the company's New Fort on Lake Superior and there report to the wintering partner."

"How far is that papa?"

"*Cherie*, I am not sure, but not far—may be one thousand mile."

CHAPTER XIV

INNOCENT BLOOD

BIG Angus leaned against the guerite of Fort Douglas stockade gazing out over the grass-covered prairie. Years had passed since his foray from York Factory and left but little mark on that powerful frame except that the beard was more grey and a slight rounding appeared in the thick shoulders. For the rest he was the same man, taciturn and morose, seeking no friendship, his eyes harder than ever.

He had travelled much. Leaving Macnab soon after that stern business in the lodge of Gheezis, he served in Buckingham House, later at the great Cumberland establishment on the Saskatchewan, and now on account of his knowledge of the country was assigned as chief clerk to the new Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company : this satisfied his taste, nor did he desire a post of greater authority. He was content to live in mental isolation, to take orders and carry them out with unquestioning exactitude.

From time to time he had gleaned news of Neil, receiving it with a certain sardonic impersonal interest, but the young man made no attempt to communicate, and they remained divided by conflicting loyalties that left any friendly intercourse impossible. More even than before they now served in contending forces.

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Sometimes he wondered about Neil in a cool indifferent, fashion, where the young man might be serving, and whether he had been fool enough to marry the half-breed girl—Angus himself having no desire for women.

To-day his gaze roved constantly over the open plain to the west. Beneath him and close to the stockade there ran past the fort and through the settlement an earth road that left the Assiniboine five miles up, touching the Red River and Frog Plain at the same distance farther down. Two miles north of the fort stretched a belt of willow-bordered impassable swamp. On his right where he stood were scattered irregularly the settlers' huts with log walls and turf-covered roofs. A mile higher up where the Assiniboine joined the Red River was what was left of the Norwesters' Fort Gibraltar.

Presently he was joined by a personage wearing a blue coat with gold braid and a military hat.

"Well, Angus, no sight of the Bois Brulés?"

"Not yet, sir."

"I am not easy; I have word from higher up that a party of Canadians has seized five canoe-loads of pemmican and fur at the Grand Rapids, also that the Bois Brulés purpose riding in this direction."

"What's to stop them?"

Governor Semple made a grimace. "I fear there is but little, which makes me anxious for the settlement."

"That settlement is in the wrong place, sir, and only an invitation to the Metis."

"You seem to forget that it is his lordship's great work," countered Semple stiffly.

"No, I am not forgetting, and I have read his lord-

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ship's book. It is a fine book and well writ, but if he had wintered on these plains like some of these poor folk, the book would read differently. The settlers are here right enough, yet they do but serve as an outlet to his ambition."

"That is strange talk from one of his servants, Campbell."

"I was in this country many a year before the company became his," answered Angus, gravely; "and even now he knows it by little more than hearsay. I tell you, sir, that every man who strikes a spade into this land makes himself an enemy to the half-breeds, and these poor crofters were better back in their own glens."

"If I did not know you to be a loyal servant I'd have you in irons for that," snapped Semple.

"I was a crofter myself, sir, and know whereof I speak."

His tone, firm though respectful, commanded attention, but Semple was in bad mood and facing a situation of which he had little previous experience. He had come to the west much intrigued with the importance of his new position: he stood high in Selkirk's confidence; and on him fell the responsibility for the war—it could be called nothing else—with the Canadians. He was assertive, impetuous, his judgment not yet tempered, and to-day he had his doubts.

Before the previous winter buried the *pays d'en haut*, Duncan Cameron, shrewd and secret emissary of the Norwesters, had succeeded in demoralizing the Highland settlers; threequarters of them were now far off in Canada, fifteen hundred miles away, and their deserted cabins had subsided into black mounds over which

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prairie flowers ran in sweet-scented riot. The remaining few herded together for security were badgered till they grew desperate by the half-breed Bois Brulés, the riders of the plains, to whom the plough was a strange and foreign thing. Far better thought the breeds to hunt the buffalo and live under an open sky. John Macleod, stout henchman of Selkirk's at the Forks of the Red River, had already beaten them off with Cuthbert Grant their guerilla leader by chopping up a chain that they fired from an ancient cannon in lieu of grape-shot; Semple himself had been attacked from the near-by Fort Gibraltar; there was sniping from the poplar thickets, and travel along the Red and Assiniboine a journey of peril. But Semple stood his ground, and in return had recaptured Gibraltar, seized Duncan Cameron, and despatched him a prisoner to York Factory for trial in England. So why should he hesitate to-day.

"You will understand," he said presently, "that everything we have done here is within our legal rights, and now I'll go further. I have forbidden all passage by the Canadians through this district. You have been many years in the country—what do you think?"

What Angus thought could be read in his eyes; he knew as Semple could not that this thing was mad and impossible: for all Selkirk's claims the western prairie was free to those who desired to come and go; the Canadians whose forts first rose on its lakes and streams prized it highly; they had opened and would hold it open. Their strength and mobility assured this.

"I am thinking, sir, that it cannot be done."

"But it is ours, Campbell, ours."

"In the interior yours is what you can keep against all-comers, and others were here long before you."

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"But his lordship so instructed me if I saw fit. We talked it over in London before I set sail and he is quite determined."

Angus shook his head. "Then I am sorry you saw fit, and his lordship has yet much to learn. We have no friends in this country but those few half-starved settlers," here he pointed to a dozen turf-roofed huts huddled near the fort for protection, "who have suffered much in getting here and would now give much to be back in the Highlands. I hear they are ready to join their friends in Upper Canada, and letters from there tell of good crops, fine land and sound sleep at night. Sir, till this territory is at peace there is no place for the settler."

"What I pronounce is the law," said the Governor, irritated.

"Ay, but what care the Metis for any law, or what cares Cuthbert Grant? They have orders from the Canadians as privateers. I tell you, sir, that any day this fort may be surrounded by men of wild blood whose fathers lifted many a white scalp. Look, sir, look now."

Two miles away there was movement along the edge of the willow-grove where the green prairie sea fringed the edge of straight silvery trunks, a movement not of wind but of men's heads which seemed to float just above the waves of grass. They might have been swimming in it.

Semple gave an exclamation and unslung a long three-jointed telescope; he balanced it between the sharpened timbers.

"You're right, Campbell, you're right! Take a look through this."

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Angus laid his eye to the thing, the glass was good, the air clear. Bois Brûlés without doubt ! They rode loosely as men born to ride, about sixty of them, pausing now and then to point and gesticulate ; he could see that some wore Indian head-dress and had painted their faces.

These men lived for the chase ; they were the buffalo hunters and providers of pemmican, finest riders in the world, their bodies merging with those of the sure-footed, round-bellied beasts they gripped with sinewy thighs. Every springtime came the great event when in hundreds, and followed by creaking carts, they ravaged the thundering herds, their mouths full of bullets, loading, firing at full gallop till the plains became dotted with black hairy mounds and the air reeked with smoke, sweat and dust. But it was not buffalo they watched for now.

Angus peered and peered, then distinguished a figure riding in front with a red kerchief round his forehead.

"He's there."

"Who?"

"Grant himself ! We'd better ca' canny, sir : the Canadians made his father guardian of the Assiniboine, and the son has the breeds in the hollow of his hand. He'll be from Qu'Apelle this time. Hadn't we better be getting those settlers inside the fort?"

The Metis had slowed, Grant was riding back along the lines as though giving orders, and Angus, swinging the glass, brought three other figures into its field ; a short, dark man with a black beard, a smaller slighter one next him, and close by a broad-shouldered, bare-headed horseman with a shock of yellow hair. At sight of this last one the glass began to waver.

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"Bring Captain Rogers here," commanded Semple sharply.

Angus did not reply : his eye was glued to the lens, straining to make sure, but he could not mistake his only son ; then to the bearded one, and that form came back to him leaning against the wall of the lodge of Gheezis with blood oozing from a punctured shoulder. Between the two—and once more he strained—that was no man, but a woman.

"Campbell, did you not hear ? My compliments to Captain Rogers and will he report to me at once."

Angus gave a deep sigh and surrendered the glass ; he could not question this thing, he could only do his duty.

Now Rogers, the young Englishman, came in a hurry, an alarm was sounded and at its call a cluster of settlers dropped spade and plough, snatched up what few treasures they might carry, and raced to the fort. The big gate received them and closed again, the yard resounded with excited voices of men, while terrified women moaned their fears in plaintive Gaelic. But still the thin line of breeds did not halt, and a faint hope stirred in Angus's leaden heart. He turned to the Governor :

"Sir, there are some provision waggons with them, so they may not mean to attack. I am thinking they just came down the river and are cutting across the long bend to Frog-Plain to save distance, for were they aiming at us they'd have stuck to the road, also," here he hesitated a moment, "I saw a woman with them and did they intend to fight she would not be there."

But Semple brushed this aside ; his gorge was up, his contempt for these people and their ways shut off all fear of them, they were trespassers and here was

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the occasion to assert his authority. It would be a lesson to the Bois Brûlés to whom he had forbidden this ground.

"Captain Rogers," he ordered, "you will muster twenty of your best men, well armed, also load the cannon and follow me. You also, Campbell. The company will stand this insolence no longer."

Angus heard and his heart sank. Cannon for the Bois Brûlés! As well might one take a musket to kill the thread-like dragon flies that vibrated in sunshine over the warm prairie grass! Twenty men, mostly big-boned crofters from Skye, Ross and Inverness to oppose not less than sixty mounted, sinewy, weather-beaten breeds wise in the wilderness and all its ways! And his son was there—his son who had an account to settle; Bouché there, who would not have forgotten Keego, The Fish; and there the girl to whom he had lied. How often that lie had come back to him, the more bitter because he had told only half the truth. He recalled that lie as marking the only time he had ever shown fear, and the fear was of a woman, a smooth-faced girl, which stung him far more than the rest of it. He had felt in his soul that he and these three were fated to meet again, but never had he dreamed it would be like this.

"Sir," he said earnestly, "I know Cuthbert Grant and his men as you and the Captain cannot. If we stay where we are and make a good showing of arms from the stockade, they will not attack at any rate in daylight, while when night comes we can be ready for them. I believe they intend no present harm—they ride on—see for yourself, sir. Should we go out now and a single shot be fired, we will be massacred."

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"Your nerves get the better of you; I had not expected this. Captain Rogers, you have my instructions."

Angus made a gesture of petition. "Sir, if you do not believe me let me at least go first alone and speak to them. There are some that—that—" his voice faltered a little—"that I know."

"You have friends in those ranks?" Semple's tone grew suspicious.

"One was a friend—once. For God's sake, sir, see how they are past the fort and move east again. They mean us no injury. Let them go, sir, let them go."

Semple looked at him hard, then shook his head and barked an order, convinced there was some ulterior reason for the attitude of his chief clerk, something that must certainly be investigated later on, but in the meantime as representative of the oldest and to him the greatest company in the world he did not propose to skulk under cover when he had something important to say to these poachers.

Now a snatching of weapons by the Highlanders; for a second time the great gate swung open and at the head of his men Semple marched out, chin up, the embodiment of authority, flanked by Rogers and his chief clerk. Behind them trundled the short bull-mouthed cannon on its heavy mounting, the small wooden wheels scoring deep ruts in the soft turf.

The Highlanders, though men of stark courage, had no more knowledge than their Governor of guerilla fighting on the plains; how might they tell that a Bois Brulé would slide half round his horse, sheltering his own body with only one foot in view, and at full gallop shoot to kill over the beast's neck. So on they

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tramped past the now empty settlement while grasshoppers whirled before heavy feet, and the thin line of Metis, who had halted in astonishment at this mad pursuit, unslung their sixty deadly rifles.

But Angus knew ; his heart was torn and he made one last appeal.

"Let me go on alone, sir," he begged, "we are far outnumbered and there can be only one end to this."

"I go not to fight but to give orders," grunted Semple, "keep to your station."

While he pleaded, the rank of mounted men was turning and riding back towards them, curving a little like a great bow as it came, extending its points till Semple's flanks were covered. Now Angus could make out but two of the figures he had recognized, so the girl must have been sent back to the rear, which meant business. In the middle of the long bow he could distinguish Cuthbert Grant quite clearly, while to his right and left were Neil and Bouché. Even from this distance Neil looked oddly older, his face was very brown, his hair darker and the frame of him seemed to have thickened. Bouché's skin was almost black with the sun. Soon it became evident that on their side they had picked out Angus, and he could feel Neil gazing straight at him but giving no sign. Now Neil turned to Bouché who lifted his hand to his eyes, stared hard and then nodded. Words were exchanged and the guide shook his head. There could be no mistake about that. Angus, missing nothing, ached to know what the words were. It was all like watching one's own flesh and blood through a thick glass sheet, like being near them yet infinitely remote, so he felt the

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more helpless and cursed the fate that had brought him to this.

The Highlanders had come to a halt, glancing dubiously at Semple; they felt uncertain, grouping themselves closely instead of separating to offer a lesser target, welding themselves into a sort of human buttress, murmuring to each other and gazing at the long undulating bow, for the Metis were never still, and moved like quicksilver. There was no sound but the impatient whinny of a horse and a light rustle of wind over the prairie grass.

Semple, advancing, lifted his hand in command and at that the wind seemed to die. Angus, apprehending the worst, breathed deeply and saw to the priming of his musket. At last it had come as he always felt it must, the servants of the old-world company in array against the buccaneers of the new; all the pin-pricking and rivalry, all the jealous hostility, every sharp turn in the fight for the fur now drew to a climax, and here on the banks of the Red River would, he felt, be settled the issue of the conflict that had ensanguined the strong woods from the mountains of New Caledonia to the Great Bay.

Semple, taking a pace forward, motioned to Grant and spoke loud and clear.

"What do you want in this district? Your passage is forbidden."

Grant laughed at him: it was taken up and ran round the line, the sun-burned Metis turned in their saddles, looked at each other and laughed, showing their white teeth like derisive Centaurs. At this point Bouché put heels to his horse and after a word with Grant advanced a little. His eyes met Angus's

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grim stare for a second, then he made a gesture to Semple.

"M'sieu," here he waved a hand at the stockade, "we were about to pass on our own business, but you have pursued us and now we want that fort. It is better to let us have it."

Semple's face grew hot with anger. "Your own fort is lower down the river, and you trespass here. I will arrest you for that."

Bouché shrugged : again his eyes dwelt on Angus for an instant with an extraordinary expression, and he had turned back to Grant as though for orders when one of the Highlanders gave a nervous twitch to his trigger. A bullet whistled past the guide's ear. Instantly he wheeled and with a motion inconceivably rapid flung up his rifle. It spoke. Semple jerked back his head, put his hand to his breast, swayed and fell. At once began a rattling fusillade from the Metis. Angus, with bullets whining over him, had levelled his musket. He saw Bouché's dark face in line with the sight, and pressed. The guide sank forward on his horse's neck, arms hanging loose, then tumbled softly to the ground. Angus, reloading, dropped on one knee.

The prairie had begun to crackle. The long, thin scimitar of mounted men was in constant motion with horned flanks still extending, and the high sun struck full on brown glossy beasts that looked riderless, while over their long-maned necks the Bois Brulés muskets spat a deadly fire. The useless cannon was forgotten. Rogers toppled over with a choking cough. The knot of Highlanders with little to shoot at and themselves offering an upstanding mark began to dwindle. Ten men, fell—another ten—and round them circled the

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Metis, their wild blood aflame, wild features painted in savage colours, yelling the piercing war-whoop as they rode, for this was the greatest hunt of all.

Angus, scatheless, laid flat on his belly, ready to sell his life as dearly as he might, when a young man cantered up, hands empty, his rifle still unslung. Blind with anger the big man took sudden aim.

"That is no use," came a hard voice, "put it down, you will not be hurt."

Angus stared along the barrel into the eyes of his son. They held each other thus for a poignant fraction of time that seemed an eternity, till the musket slowly lowered. Angus's throat was dry; something tugged in his breast, and for one extraordinary moment he wanted to cry out that here was one for whom he would be glad to die if that would put things right between them, but searching the young face he found it like flint. At this his own heart suddenly turned to stone, and the voiceless moment fled, leaving a gulf even deeper than before.

"You will not be hurt," repeated Neil harshly, "stay where you are. Give me that gun."

Grant was now racing in front of his men reckless of bullets, waving, shouting, appalled by the sight of such butchery. He had not intended anything like this. Firing became irregular, then ceased altogether and was succeeded by a strange hush in which the Metis looked at each other with bright restless eyes, not altogether content, for their blood was up. Then a murmur ran along the line for between its encircling horns twenty Highlanders lay prone, some twitching, some already motionless. A few survivors stood with hands over their heads, wondering if the end for them also

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had arrived ; from the fort came the cries of women in terror, and a few heads of the scanty garrison protruded over the stockade.

Now the ends of the horn met, the circle contracted and the Bois Brulés stared down at their handiwork. Young Roger's eyes had closed while near him Semple was choking out the remnants of life and trying to speak but could not. Farther back, a little outside the circle, Bouché lay on his side with eyes dimming and shot through the lungs. There were little bubbles of blood at the corners of the mouth that had smiled so often, and beside him knelt a girl in a deer-skin tunic with two long, heavy braids of hair.

"*Alors, petite, c'est fini,*" whispered the guide.

She could not move or speak ; she was thunderstruck and only her lips moved. She pressed the slack hand.

"*Chérie*, we should not have joined those Bois Brulés, but travelled alone as before" ; the voice was faint now, "when you meet him tell your *beau-père*—when he becomes that, tell—tell him that he shoots better than I thought."

At this she quivered and put her face close to his.

"It was he who—who——"

Bouché gave the least perceptible nod. She felt her hand receive a weak pressure that gradually relaxed and something meant for a smile illumined his face. He died like that.

It seemed a long time afterwards when a shadow fell across the grass, and Neil stood beside her.

Then he knelt and put his arm round her shoulders, drawing her close.

"*Chérie, chérie !* I have no words for this."

"You know who did it?" she asked shivering.

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"I know."

"Then what will you do?"

He took her face between his hands and gazed at her earnestly. "There is nothing I can do, nothing."

"Will you not kill him too?"

"No, already there is too much killing. Julie, to-day, you cannot understand it, but someday perhaps you will. Your father killed that mad Governor and in answer my father killed yours, each thinking he did his duty. The plain is red and more than twenty men are dead who did nothing to deserve death. But this will be the end of it—men after this will not fight any more over fur."

She could not believe it, for always so far back as she could recall anything it had been something like this only not so bad. Men fighting over fur! It seemed to be a part of her whole life, and was the more strange because after all they were much the same kind of men and quite often seemed to be friends. They didn't do it for money, and in the strong woods no one had any money, yet they appeared to go mad over fur just as the Indians went mad over high wine, and so long as the fur lasted, what was there to change it?

Incredulous, she gazed at her father and wondered could he really be dead, this man who had always been so quick and strong and happy. No, it couldn't be true, so she put a hand towards his heart, then drew it slowly back. In later years he had been to her both father and mother, and at the thought of this a thousand tender intimate things returned in a flood and tortured her till in this moment of farewell her Indian blood called wildly for revenge. She had long known all that Bouché could tell her about Angus, for that

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story could not be kept ; she knew all that had happened in the lodge of Gheezis and that Angus had lied when he met her. But she never spoke of it because it would hurt Angus's son. Perhaps it were easier to have no father at all than one like that.

Then she looked up at the man she loved, and at the agony in his eyes her arms went round his neck.

"No," she whispered, "I do not understand. It is so hard for you too, but perhaps you can teach me. I love you ! Here beside my father I tell you that again and nothing shall change it. Were you to kill me I should still love you. Now go away."

"You are chief clerk here ?" It was the prairie leader, Cuthbert Grant, who spoke, his eyes bright with triumph, and caring little what it cost.

Angus, still waiting where Neil had left him, looked up and nodded : close by lay twenty men in a tangle of death, the remaining few, saved with difficulty from the Bois Brulés, were disarmed. The plain vibrated with the shouts of insensate half-breeds careering madly about, brandishing their muskets, and within the fort a small community waited to hear its fate.

"Then on you the authority falls. This is the end of the English company in this country, and if the fort be not surrendered and all that is in it, we will attack and exterminate the whole breed. Decide quickly, for my men are hard to hold."

Angus stared at him with contempt. "You tell me this when in the fort are kinsmen to your own father ?"

"That counts for nothing, and they took the wrong turning." Here Grant made an imperative gesture. "I give you one quarter-hour and no more, so get back

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and save the lives of your people if you are wise. For myself enough blood has been shed for one day, but if the Metis must storm the place, who will survive inside ? ”

This was only the truth, and Angus saw it ; the riders of the plains were flushed with victory, and he looked about perhaps to catch sight of his son, but found only a heap of dead, and started slowly for the fort wondering not a little if a bullet would find its way between his shoulders. From the stockade the garrison watched him till he gave a sign. Then the gate opened a fraction and there was a great hush till, gradually, the flag of the English came down as though it rebelled at leaving the warm air. The great gate swung wide.

Well was it in that hour for those surviving of Semple's men that Grant was able to keep a masterful control, for he had his plan and was determined to carry it out. There was no more shooting ; the Metis found the fort square empty when they crowded into it, Angus had seen to that. Women and children had hidden themselves in the corners of cabins, but few men were visible, and the whole place seemed dead. At once Grant posted sentries over the gate, the store and liquor cellar, and swore that the first sign of rioting would be quelled with bullets.

When a sort of rough military order had been established, he conferred with Neil. Night had come, the fury of the hour had slackened, and something of a reaction was setting in. He had had time to think, and the burden of blood lay heavy on him, but, he reminded himself, only half of his duty was yet completed.

“ There is now but one thing,” he said gravely, “ and

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no more lives will be taken, except perhaps one, if I can help it. This business was not our fault; we had no intention to attack, and later when you are called to testify, as you certainly will be, you can bear witness to this. I regret the Governor's death, but had he stayed inside this fort his flag would be flying now, and ourselves camped on the Frog Plain. For the rest of it, this settlement must be abandoned and the fort destroyed, so you will go amongst these people and tell them."

"You mean that?" Neil was dumbfounded.

"You will see for yourself whether I mean it, and it was always a mad thing to plant the settlement here as Semple must have seen when he came first were he not blind. I have now fought him for one whole year and this is the end—for him. These Highlanders had been wiser did they go to Canada with the rest of their friends, so here I will finish what Duncan Cameron began. Listen!"

Outside in the fort square the Bois Brulés had formed a great feeling circle and were dancing round a blazing fire with painted faces, many of them stripped naked, their wild souls in exultation. Save for their lighter skins there was little to distinguish them from savages. To-day there had been a great killing, the blood-lust still ran hot, all around them were the untouched treasures of the English, and every appetite was roused. Now the war-whoop came clear, and Grant made a significant gesture.

"I have given my order and will endeavour to enforce it, but you see what I have to deal with. This settlement must make its way to Norway House lest worse befall it."

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"That is five hundred miles and more," said Neil, shaking his head.

"What is five hundred miles in the month of June? and from here to Lake Winnipeg there is no danger. Also Norway House is on the route back to Scotland that they would be wise to take."

"And you, what next?"

"I will send an express messenger with news of this victory to Fort William, where it will not be taken amiss; also there is one man to be dealt with of whom I would speak, the one who killed Bouché."

Neil's muscles tightened but his eyes held steady. "What of him?"

"He is under guard in his own house?"

"Yes, as you ordered: why did you order it?"

"Otherwise I doubt he would be alive. Now listen to me carefully. When Bouché and you and your woman joined my people in the west my Metis were glad, and I was glad too because I needed such men to help me against the English. All that he and you said and did was good. Soon the Bois Brûlés learned to love Bouché, and though older than most of them he became like their brother. Now two hours ago some of them demanded that they be given the life of the one who killed him."

"His life!"

"That is what they want."

"Yet he did but kill the man who killed his Governor," Neil's voice had grown a shade unsteady, "and each did what he thought to be his duty. The Englishman lies there now with none to bury him, while my woman sits beside her father with her head covered and will not speak. Is not that enough?"

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"Yes, but the Metis think nothing of it and seek revenge," here he paused in a sudden shade of sadness and sighed deeply. "Now that the thing is done, I would be glad to forget this day whatever satisfaction it gives in Fort William, for we Metis have no real enmity against these Scots that are dead. This thing is not their fault or ours, but they believed the madman who sent them here and have paid for his mistake. This is our hunting-ground and not a farm for Selkirk, and until he learns that there will be war. As to the prisoner I have promised my answer in the morning; so what shall I say? And if I refuse, the slaughter will begin again, perhaps taking many lives instead of one. I may not be able to hold my Metis, and no servant of Selkirk would escape. Shall it be the one—or many?"

He said this with a look so strange and piercing, that Neil who was about to urge his plea of kinship suddenly perceived that it was no secret. Grant knew—without doubt he knew. It had been common knowledge that one, Angus Campbell, was chief clerk to Governor Semple at Fort Douglas, but only Bouché and Julie had been aware that this man's son was Grant's trusted lieutenant, so the good-natured garrulous guide must at some time have told Grant. And even in this grievous moment it seemed strange to Neil that not by any word or sign had the head of the Bois Brulés ever revealed his knowledge of this divided kinship.

"Then you know?" said the young man in a low voice.

Grant put a brown hand on his shoulder. "I know that meantime the prisoner is safe, also that it will be for you to relieve his guard. You understand that?"

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"You will go on duty," he added with sharp emphasis and a quick meaning stare, "from midnight to sunrise."

With this he went out of Semple's office—it was built of oak timbers floated down the Assiniboine from the captured Fort Gibraltar—and approached the circle round the fire. Presently the dancing ceased, the wild figures gathered about him, and Neil knew only too well the subject of their talk.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER AND SON

ANGUS sat in his own house, a small one not far from that of Semple, wondering how long he had to live. There was no light save that of the Bois Brulés' fire flickering through the small glass window—Semple had brought that glass from England—and he thought the fire a reckless thing in the midst of so many buildings. Semple would not have allowed it. A platter of pemmican was on the table, a guard with feathers in his hair and a loaded rifle lounged at the door humming one of Pierre Falcon's chansons of the Red River brigade. For the rest of it, Angus was surrounded by his own possessions, a captive under his own roof.

His thoughts went back to a few hours ago when he was surrounded by a ring of furious Metis, and Grant at the risk of his own life had herded them back and put him here with orders to stay. He thought it was wise to do so. He had seen Neil come up with the guard and post the man on unwilling duty, speaking not at all to himself. Then Neil had given him one strange straight look and turned away. Since then there had been nothing, but one could not mistake what lay in store.

In this hour of uncertainty Angus felt, oddly enough, a sort of contempt for the whole affair, and did not to

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his own surprise deeply regret his own part in it : 'twas a reasonable climax to all that had gone before, he had only done what he had conceived to be his duty and stood ready to pay the cost.' And from what he had heard of Cuthbert Grant he did not think that the guerilla leader would allow torture of a captive.

At the same time he would have been glad to live longer if only to see what came to Neil in the future, for now owing to some curious reason he felt a novel interest in his son, the first he had really felt for anyone in more than half a lifetime. He would have liked to keep his distance and follow the young man's progress : in spite of all that had happened he was somehow glad that he had a son of this sort, and in his own austere fashion was oddly content that Neil should finish up on the winning side. No doubt he would have a large quarter-breed family and rise high in the service of the Canadians ; ultimately he might even become a partner, and retire to a fine house in Montreal.

By midnight the noise in the square had subsided, the whole fort was plunged in silence ; the Metis had hobbled their horses on the prairie near by, and, despising cover, lay like children in the long grass, dreaming of plunder that on the morrow would be theirs. A mile away where the flowers had been trampled under the feet of racing horses the moon cast a pale light on upturned faces, and here Semple and his men took their last sleep near the small bull-mouthed cannon that had been loaded but not fired. Fifty yards farther on rested Bouché, and beside him was a slight figure that for hour after hour had not stirred. A cool breeze caressed the warmly breathing prairie, and a low lisp

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came from the river as it slid eastwards between high clay banks.

Julie felt someone touch her very gently and saw Neil with a spade in his hand.

"*Chérie*, I could not get here before, having had many duties. As to those others I do not know, but there is now something to be done here."

She shivered a little, turned and hid her face while the spade struck into the soft turf. It did not take long, and soon there showed but a narrow mound where before was blood-stained grass. Then he put his arm around her.

"The one we loved is at least safe from the wolves, you must not think of him otherwise, and we will talk of this later but not now. Also, *chérie*, there is something very important to be attended to, so listen to me. A little below the fort and close to the river you will find a canoe and paddles. Go there now and wait, making no sound and be not afraid. I will come soon."

With that he left her.

At midnight, Angus, sitting by candlelight, heard a voice at the door speaking in French, then the door opened and Neil came in, a musket under his arm. He stood this against the wall while Angus waited, his features hardening into a sort of challenge.

"You," said he after a strained moment, "what do you want here?" adding, with indescribable bitterness, "my son."

Neil winced and studied the grim face with its craggy indomitable brows on which was printed a great weariness. His father had aged, there were deep lines carved where no lines showed in the lodge of Ghezis; the dour fighting spirit still burned in him, but his beard

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was shot with grey, the big frame showed all the signs of an arduous life and the sudden perception woke a long-sleeping chord in the young man's breast. This father of his had made others suffer, but himself had not escaped. And were they not both in the hands of fate.

"Well," said Angus again, "what do you here?"

"There is much to be said, but little time for it now."

"Then we have till sunrise and naught else to do."

"And at sunrise?"

"That is for your leader the rebel murderer to say—let him say it."

Neil shook his head. "I know well what you think of me, and think what you will, but that does not matter, so listen. I have had word with Grant and there is left to him no choice in this affair. For himself he would not have you shot, though God knows there was shooting enough, but the Metis swear that for Bouché's life they will have yours—or else—"

"Or else—what?"

"Every prisoner in this fort, man, woman and child, may be put to the death," creaked Neil.

"Ay," Angus nodded slowly, "I thought it might be like that. Since when have you consorted with these butchers of the plains?"

"Ask me that another time: meantime are you ready to leave?"

At this Angus gave a start, then stood very still with a look of amazement in his eyes that presently hardened to profound contempt.

"Are you in your senses?"

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"I am, but shortly not you, if you stay here." Striding to the door Neil took a sharp glance round the square, which was now quiet with the embers glowing a dull red. A light burned in the Governor's house showing that Cuthbert Grant still sat pondering the outcome of this day and what his next move must be. The settlers and *engagés* were invisible, and only the cry of a frightened child broke the stillness. Neil waited for one tense moment, turned and beckoned :

"For the first and last time will you put yourself in my hands, and come quickly?"

Angus shook his massive head. "I am no coward, and you misread your own blood."

"I know that Cuthbert Grant does not desire your death," said Neil, flushing hotly, "and that is why I am here. The rest lies only with us two."

"And failing my death many others may perish?"

"That," replied Neil gravely, "is in the hands of God. Come."

"None but a Bois Brulé would deem that God had any part in this affair," countered Angus coldly. "You are my son and there is no love between you and me, but I had believed you knew me better than to urge this thing."

Neil gazed despairingly at the resolute face, and a flood of feeling, of pity, remorse and admiration swept over him, for in that moment of strife, enmity and danger his hardness melted and something burst suddenly into vivid life. Here stood his father! Yielding to a great wave of emotion, the heart of the young man was torn, and he knew that he loved him and he felt ready to die himself instead; there drifted back old visions of earlier days when, a child, he waited at a bothy door.

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for a big man to come down from the hills with a red deer over his shoulders, heard his great laugh and played with his thick brown beard.

But now his father stood watching him with eyes like flints, and he knew that no feeling of softness could alter that resolve. Angus had settled the question for himself. Better that one die than many perish.

"Is it a Campbell that talks thus to a Campbell?" sneered Angus. "Truly your blood must have changed when you mixed it with that of your brown bitch."

The young man trembled: for one instant he paused irresolute, then with all his power drove a great hard fist into his father's face: it landed on the temple, bone on bone with a dull crash: Angus gave his arms an odd twitch, his head jerked back: he dropped, a dead weight, and lay still.

A moment later Neil crossed the empty yard bending under the weight of a slack-body on his back. At the gate the Metis guard laughed at the sight of his burden, withdrew the big oaken sliding bar and waved him on, for this was Cuthbert Grant's chief lieutenant who doubtless had good reason for what he was doing. At any rate there was one less of the English to be dealt with. Neil did not speak but moved quickly on to the river a few hundred yards below the fort with his senseless freight, and in the moonlight saw Julie.

She sprang up with a cry, "Who is that?"

"The man who killed your father," said Neil quietly. "Now, push the canoe out a little and hold it steady while I put him in. There!"

"He is not dead?"

"No, not dead, but unwilling to do what I asked."

She stared at the big form lying slack in the bottom

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of the canoe, and was quite bewildered. "But Neil, why did you do this, why did you bring him here?"

"To-night I cannot explain, but perhaps some day you will understand. You are ready?"

"Ready for what?"

"I do not know—I cannot tell you, but get in now and paddle, paddle hard and do not talk. It will be sunrise before long, when we must be far from here."

The Red River, swollen with discharge from a thousand gulleys ran swiftly not far below the top of its level banks, and with the stream they travelled fast, making no sound but the sprinkling drip-drip, as their blades swung forward. At each stroke the canoe leaped under Neil's powerful thrust, and Julie kneeling in the bows welcomed the familiar feel of the shaft in her hands. Now they had the prairie to themselves. The stockade of Fort Douglas had vanished round a bend, the dead Highlanders scattered about their dead Governor withdrew farther and farther, and were it not for the unconscious man behind her, the tragedy of the past day had seemed to Julie like a dream. Tall grass lipped the river-bank, the moon swam white and clear, bubbles murmured at the canoe's sharp front, Neil's broad shoulders heaved forward as he put weight into the stroke, and the girl traversed in wondering silence a land that was new to her.

She longed to know what was moving in his mind, but in virtue of her native training she said nothing : so often it had been like this, whereas she by impulse told him all her thoughts, though in past years she had learned that it was not his nature to confide in any, even in herself. Experience too had taught her that though loving him greatly she must often do without

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him : he was exacting : travel where he might alone, and he had travelled much, always he expected to find her in a certain place by a certain day, and being made docile by her love she obeyed him. Her consolation was that however he might journey, always he returned to her ; he desired no other woman, and knowing this she rejoiced in it.

Since the affair in the lodge of Cheezis these three had made a sort of loosely knit trinity that somehow held together in spite of space, circumstance and time. Bouché, who more than anything else desired to save enough to retire to Trois Rivières, served as interpreter at post after post, always managing to be moved—when a move offered—a little nearer Montreal, for his face was set towards the east. Thus he had a home for his girl. Neil, for his part, wished no stationary position, he had no intention to spend the best part of his life in trading with savages, and joined expedition after expedition, soon earning a name for courage and resolution. He had managed to be posted to Simon Fraser and help that great explorer build Fort George in New Caledonia : commended by Fraser to Thompson, he accompanied Thompson down the Columbia, where with delight he met David Stuart, and had long talks about early days on Buffalo Lake : on Lake Athabasca he had moved amongst the Chipewyans, buying all the fur and so scattering the savages that when John Clarke, the Englishman, reached the great lake in an effort to recapture that trade, he found the country naked of fur and flesh and was hard put to it to survive the winter : in the mountains he rediscovered Daniel Harmon, whose thoughtful nature was now much more interested in Christianity than fur. They had recalled their

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first meeting at New Fort, and how much, thought Neil, of what Harmon had then told him was since proved to be true. Lastly, moving eastward, he had rejoined Bouché and Julie, and falling in with Cuthbert Grant moved on towards Lake Winnipeg. Grant was no trader but of a disposition reckless and roving, and on him, with his following of Bois Brulés, the Canadians most counted in their warfare with the English company.

But to-night Neil's spirit was weary ; he felt that for a while he had seen enough of hardship, effort and fighting : he wanted to rest : he wanted to marry Julie and settle down—he had promised her that—and fell to wondering how far one must travel to find a priest.

Now of a sudden he became aware that Angus's eyes were open.

It had been a strange awakening : a soft gurgle of water creeping across a blind sea of unconsciousness—a feeling of motion and cool air—the gradual solidification of a hazy figure that seemed to swim towards him, at first unfamiliar but slowly taking recognizable proportions. Then came a rush of memory.

He had been lying quite still for some time watching the moon that shone into his eyes just over Neil's head so that his son seemed to be recrowned at every stroke with a sort of milky coronet. His face was set, his big body worked rhythmically, and the canoe trembled a little as he used his strength. Where, wondered Angus, was Neil taking him—and why ? Presently he spoke in a low tone, and the girl, half turning, rested her paddle across the thwarts and looked back and down at him. He was aware of this. But Neil paddled on.

"Where do we go ?" croaked Angus.

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"Down the river."

"Why did you strike me?"

"I had no desire to see you shot, and there was no other way."

There came a silence after that, then :

"But those others?"

"We can leave that to Grant, who is not responsible for your escape, and the Metis will realize this. They will be given liquor and ask for nothing else but plunder."

Angus thought that over. No, there could have been no other way, and perhaps he ought to feel grateful, but no gratitude moved in him, and he would rather owe nothing to this son of his, not even his life. The son had taken his own forceful way but left his father in an unenviable light, and the breach between them yawned even wider.

"And you, what do you do now?"

"My business," said Neil tersely.

Such was the answer he would have given himself, and a twisted smile curved on Angus's lips.

"Ay, your business, but what do you do with me?"

This sounded so like surrender that Neil too gave a grim smile.

"It is for you to say what you will do with yourself, but you are not safe if you fall in with the Bois Brulés, and the same roof cannot cover us both. At sunrise I will leave you, and if you travel west you will come to Brandon House which is under the flag of the English, or you can wait till the next English brigade passes this way to Norway House. It is for you to say."

Angus nodded slowly ; now he was beginning to be rather glad to be alive ; he would be glad to reach

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either House, give the tale of Fort Douglas and help to organize revenge. Also there was something else that occurred to him at this moment that would be better still, and even more in line with his duty, but that he kept very much to himself. The old love of conflict revived strongly in him ; there were still left a few more years in which to fight, but he hoped his son would not make the mistake of deeming him at all grateful for his own preservation.

"Ay," he said calmly, "either will serve."
That was all, while Julie, marvelling, held her peace, then took up her paddle thinking how much alike were these two, how mutually hard, and stern and unforgiving, but it was not in her to perceive that they shared something that each had rather die than reveal. No one with French blood was anything like that. She herself could feel nothing but hatred for the man stretched out behind her, again she saw Bouché lying with that red stain on his breast, and the whole world seemed dark with bitterness and murder. But she said not a word.

Dawn burned on the horizon heralding a hot day when Neil turned in to shore at the mouth of a gulley. The canoe touched land, and when Angus stepped out none of them spoke. Birds were already chattering, warmth was creeping into the air, and the cicada's shrill thin note already greeted the sun. There was no cloud in the vast, blue arch that overstretched the prairie. Now Neil put out Julie's rifle, a flint and steel and small sack of pemmican, whereat Angus made a curt sign of acknowledgement. It seemed that he had not expected this, and was vaguely surprised. Then a pause while the grey eyes that had so far avoided each other met in

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a straight relentless stare, for the moment had come and each faced it in exactly the same fashion.

"I'm not thanking you for my life," said Angus with dry asperity, "I didn't want it, make no mistake about that."

"It was not done for thanks," the voice matched his own in hardness, "but we shall doubtless meet again."

"Ay, doubtless, so long as murderers ride free over the plains. I bid you good day."

He slung the sack over his back, shouldered the rifle, and vanished in the waves of grass.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RECKONING

MY Lord Selkirk, putting all else aside for the sake of his great ambition, had spent the last winter in Montreal, passing only a curt time of day when he met any of the Norwester partners, for the breach between them was now so sharp that social intercourse would have been too strained. He was unbidden to dine with the Beaver Club, and those meetings were held with more enthusiasm than ever, as indeed well they might be. For six years in the past eight the ancient company had paid no dividend, while the business of their rivals flourished exceedingly. On the ruins of Astoria on the Columbia the Canadians had established a sound trade and sent to that territory in the present season no less than fifteen thousand pounds in goods. Trade in China was well under way; to the Orient they had sold a hundred thousand skins shipped in vessels fitted out by their own agents, while to England had been forwarded a hundred and fifty thousand, and during this period Selkirk's shipments from the interior dwindled and dwindled, and the burden of his struggling crofters lay ever more heavy upon him.

Five long arduous years had passed since the young Earl bought control of the Hudson's Bay Company, vowing to spend his life and energy in bringing the

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plough to the prairie. With high courage he had voted himself a dominion in the west, and founded his first settlement, but it proved that such dominion existed only on paper ; he was in conflict with forces that he had not reckoned on, and so long as the great herds paraded the banks of the Red and Assiniboine, just so long would the wild Metis follow the chase and see to it that buffalo and oxen should not be found in the same land. That was what Selkirk now faced ; his dream had become distorted, his ambition imperilled, and instead of grain there was only conflict.

But this man of high determination did not waver. More crofters said good-bye to their barren glens and took the arduous route across the Atlantic, over the treacherous waters of the Great Bay, up the ragged reaches of the Nelson, along the bare wind-whipped shores of Lake Winnipeg, and so after months of effort and hardship to the clay banks of the Red River. They were all sturdy, all brave, all loyal, but with everything yet to learn of this new country. They were poorly provisioned. Fuel was scarce. For six months of winter they shivered in poorly structured huts, staring out over the snow-covered prairie, thinking of Scotland, the land so far and dear they would never see again. In summer came armies of grass-hoppers swarming under a blistering sun to consume the virgin crops. The Saulteaux Indians around them were incited by the Norwesters to attack and wipe out the intruders, but, firmly controlled by Peguis, Chief of Chiefs, the red men held to their hunting and left the whites to themselves. The Bois Brulés however were never appeased, life in the settlement a ceaseless round of alarms, and none could

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tell when the horsemen of the plains might appear and spit death from their unerring rifles. Within the palisade of Fort Douglas lay the only possible refuge.

Nor were the masters of the Metis less active. McGillvray, Mackenzie, Fraser, McLaughlin and the rest of them kept their heads together, and decided that under this new leadership the English company was even more vulnerable than before. Gone were the days when an English post manager walked over to the fort of his rival, drank tea with him, discussed the last news from Montreal or London, and amicably parcelled out the savages with whom each would make individual trade. On the Swan, on the English River, on the Saskatchewan and Lake Athabasca there was ambush and attack; the strong woods were alive with enmity; the English seized Canadian pemmican, the Montrealers captured English pelts, and the frenzy for fur mounted ever higher, while the savage, smoking at the door of his teepee, saw the white men whom his fathers had deemed gods rivalling his own wildest instincts. Liquor flowed free in the interior, and reprisals spread from the Great Lakes to New Caledonia. The voyageurs burned dry wood in their camp-fires lest smoke betray them, and duels were fought while the red man watched and wondered.

Selkirk, thus driven, stiffened his back. He knew that in the past his company's posts had been undergarrisoned, and now they must be better manned; he had learned that his settlers could not both plough and fight, now they must be protected. Animated by this resolution, and to strengthen his own authority, he was able in the city of the Canadians to secure an appointment as Justice of Peace, and then, feeling that a dis-

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ciplined force always carried weight, engaged a hundred militant settlers in the persons of de Meuron Swiss mercenaries who had been sent to Canada by the British Government at the time of the futile American invasion.

On a day in June, still ignorant of the fate of Fort Douglas, the young Earl sat in the leading canoe of his formidable brigade : they had portaged the rapids of the Ste. Marie and now entered the huge expanse of Lake Superior on their way to the Red River, with the intention to travel not by Fort William but taking the longer way round by Fond du Lac, thus avoiding the great establishment of the Norwesters. To use that route would, felt Selkirk, only invite a conflict that he was anxious if possible to avoid. The de Meurons, big, light-haired men of quiet courage and the habit of obedience, were staring about and wondering how far this country extended, for not before this had any of them journeyed farther west than the gorges of the Niagara. Now they had passed Point aux Pins, which rested like a faint blue smear on the eastern horizon, and the deep gulley of Goulais Bay yawned in front, backed by a rampart of misty hills.

For hour after hour Selkirk sat plunged in thought, aware only of the rhythmical dip of swinging paddles. He was very silent on this journey, for it was the first time he had followed the old-established route of his rivals, and what he saw on the way impressed him with the strength of their position. At many points were definite signs of permanent occupation and established communications, and what struck him forcibly was that though the cost of transporting their goods over these endless leagues by man power was much higher than,

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that of sea carriage to the Bay, yet they beat their competitors in trade.

At Sault Ste. Marie their blockhouse, a twenty-foot cube of stone with its overhanging superstructure of timber, commanded the small masonry lock they had built to lighten their labours, and which formerly caused the XY such bitterness of heart. The twin villages, one of them spreading on either side the great river and regarding each other across its foaming rapids, smiled with gardens and cultivated fields, and the sight of such peace, comfort and security aroused in Selkirk anxious visions of what he would find on the Red River. Why, he asked himself, should all this be? Only that there burned in the Canadians a spirit that the English had lacked. How, he wondered, was the difference to be met, and had he himself, though greatly trusted by the raw-boned men of Argyle, painted for them a picture in colours far too bright? But he would not fail them now.

He was thus engrossed when the bowman pointed ahead, "M'sieu, another brigade comes this way, look!"

Selkirk shaded his eyes from the setting sun and saw in the distance a diamond glint that flashed intermittently across the plain of shining waters.

"There are three *canots*—*canots du maître*—no—four—and not voyageurs: that, m'sieu, is not the stroke of the *mangeurs de lard*."

They drew nearer till Selkirk could clearly distinguish four great thirty-foot canoes all heavily laden; the paddles rose and dipped in haphazard fashion, not the voyageurs' stroke; still nearer he could see the bowmen who were certainly French, while in the bodies

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of the light craft were men and women, and the bare heads of children hung over the gunwales as they trailed small red hands in the ice-cold water. Selkirk's heart gave a quick beat.

"*Étrangers, m'sieu*, and what do they here? *Mon Dieu ! regardez les pauvres petits.*"

They came abreast, halted, floating alongside at paddle-length distance, the canoes like great upturned yellow leaves on the pale flood, and a broad-shouldered, bearded man, freckle-faced, his sandy hair patched with grey, looked hard at the young nobleman. His skin was peeling and blistered.

"Who might you be, sir?"

Selkirk, grasping at the truth, told him.

"Well, sir," went on the man gravely, "I am Campbell, Angus Campbell, from your settlement on the Red River. Here they all are."

"Go on," said Selkirk shakily.

"Here is all that is left of your crofters except only a few that made for Norway House and those that set out last year for Lake Ontario. Fort Douglas is captured by the half-breeds, the Governor and Captain Rogers and twenty of your men killed, I had not time to count them, and——"

"Semple killed!"

"Ay, sir, it's as I tell you: I was with him and a few others, but," he added firmly, "I killed the one that shot him."

"And the fort?" breathed Selkirk incredulously.

"'Twas being looted, sir, when I left with these poor souls, and likely to be burned long before this. When we got away the Metis were going through it like a pack of wolves, taking what they would except the fur, and

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Cuthbert Grant who was at the head of them swore that would go to Fort William. Then these poor folk were bid to start for their friends at Norway House did they not wish to die where they stood."

"How got you here?"

"I'll tell you, sir. You'll understand that I did not run away, but after the fort was captured I escaped, and hid myself not far off awaiting what was likely to happen. On the next day I saw these crofters of yours coming distraught down the river not knowing where to go, so because I was acquainted with the country I joined them and took command. You see, sir, I was chief clerk at Fort Douglas. Then we came on by Lake Winnipeg and Lac des Pluies to Fort William where there were some of the Canadian partners. So content were they to get the news of Fort Douglas that they did us no harm and gave us bigger-canoes and food enough to take us to Lake Ontario. I'll say that for them. It seems they thought the victory cheap at the price."

Selkirk nodded slowly : here he was floating on the surface of Lake Superior beside crofters from Argyle whom he had never seen before, but sent by way of the Great Bay to the Red River. It was hard to imagine, still harder to accept, and the curious eyes of these dependants of his were watching him with profound attention. More now than ever before did their future lie in his hands, so what would he say or do?

"You tell me that Captain Rogers was killed with the Governor?" he asked after a strained pause.

"Ay, and fell beside him : they were all killed like cattle, sir. In the daytime the crows plucked out their eyes, while at night the prairie wolves fought over what was left. You see, sir, the Metis didn't care and there

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were no others to bury them. If the Governor had been content to stay inside the fort we had had a fair chance to beat them off, but Mr. Semple was all for going out. Well, we went."

"He had ordered the half-breeds out of that country?" said the young Earl.

"He had, but what of it? Cuthbert Grant obeys the Canadians and no others, and the Metis follow him."

Now it was borne on Selkirk that here with these anxious eyes fixed on him he must make a great decision. The fat was in the fire. So much time, thought and money, so much heart-searching and fine human ambition had gone into his plan that he could not retreat. He foresaw days to come when no more fur would be taken along the waters of the Red, and cabins of pioneers would cluster where now were only the lodges of the beaver, but so long as the Canadians killed and plundered that dawn must wait.

"Campbell," he asked harshly, "who is at Fort William now?"

"Some of the partners who do not winter in the strong woods, sir: Mr. Fraser will be there and Mr. Kenneth Mackenzie and the one they call Dr. McLaughlin. The brigades for the Peace and Athabasca were preparing to set off when we came through, taking the wintering partners with them, but these three gentlemen were not for the interior. And," he added, "the fort is stuffed with fur."

"Ah! Any others of importance?"

"Not many, sir, but," here Angus's lips tightened, "there are one or two that had a part in the attack on Fort Douglas; they brought the first word south, and have been at Fort William ever since."

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"You would know these men—you could point them out?"

"One of them I could," answered Angus in a hard tone.

Selkirk looked at him fixedly, marking the rugged strength of the man's face, his dogged determination and the stony eyes that conveyed a life of bitter experience.

"How long have you been with the Hudson's Bay?"

"Over twenty-five years now, sir! I began under Mr. Tomison at Cumberland House."

"You mean to remain with us?"

"Ay, I'll stick to my job; Mr. Fraser talked to me at Fort William offering service under him, but I wouldna' think of it."

"Campbell," said his master, nodding towards the waiting canoes, "we cannot talk further here, so these friends of mine will camp with my brigade to-night. There is something urgent I desire to discuss with you."

Three of the Norwester partners, Simon Fraser, Kenneth Mackenzie and John McLaughlin sat in the great hall at Fort William pleasantly occupied in calculating the season's take of fur. The west-bound brigades after one long satisfying orgy at the *cantine salope* had departed laden with goods, the wintering partners had said good-bye till next June, clerks and accountants bent their heads over leather-bound ledgers. The schooner *Invincible* was hauled up on the bank of the Kaministiquia having her planking recaulked before sailing for Sault Ste. Marie, and there

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resounded the steady tap-tap of wooden mallets ; some debauched Indian girls in bright cotton frocks paraded past a group of *mangeurs de lard* who were lounging in the sun, and over this emporium of the Montrealers rested an atmosphere of gorged content. The place suggested a crude and insolent security.

"I make it as nearly as possible sixty thousand pounds' worth," said Mackenzie, smiling at the others, "and that is saying nothing of our take on the Pacific. I do not think we have had a better year."

"We have not," agreed Fraser, "and again I am impressed by the fact that the farther north the better the fur. Did you examine the packs from Great Bear Lake?"

"I did, and they were like silk in texture."

"That great river of your cousin's," put in McLaughlin, "is serving us finely, and with the beaver falling off we shall need those pelts. I have an idea that we should consider halving our purchases of castoreum to give the animals a chance. What do you think?"

"They have not suffered over-much from our rivals, and I am thinking less of them than of that Athabasca affair."

The others nodded. A year previously the Hudson's Bay company had sent an expedition to Mackenzie River waters under one John Clarke, a former employee of the Canadians : the Norwesters were ready, disaster ensued and eighteen men starved to death.

"That affair must have cost them forty thousand pounds if a penny," ruminated Fraser, "but I believe they are not finally beaten yet and will try it again."

McLaughlin shook his head ; he was a big man of formidable and rather uncouth build, large intense eyes

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and stern cast of face. "The pocket of my lord Selkirk may be deep, but not quite so deep as that, and he has more pressing matters nearer home to think about just now." He paused, frowning a little, and looked rather disturbed. "Gentlemen, let us be frank about this Fort Douglas affair. For myself I confess to feeling uneasy. I ask myself, will it redound to our advantage or not? We were prepared for possible loss of life on both sides, but nothing like this, and I doubt if it is wise to retain Cuthbert Grant in our employ."

"So far as concerns the loss of life," said Fraser, "I feel as you do, but we have been assured by the man, Neil Campbell, that Grant had provision waggons with him and no real intention to attack. He had left the road in order to pass a reasonable distance from the fort, he gave no evidence of hostility, and the fort was actually in his rear when Semple sallied out with an armed force and a cannon."

"A cannon on the plains? Surely not," murmured Mackenzie.

"It lies there yet, and when the Bois Brulés saw it they could not be restrained: also I am told that Grant regrets the slaughter as much as we do."

"You seem to have gathered some confidential information," said Fraser, "and it fits not badly with what the other Campbell——" Here he bit off his words and struck the table a blow. "By God, gentlemen, I see it now—did you perceive anything peculiar when these two men of the same name confronted each other?"

"Nothing but a mutual and natural animosity which one can well understand."

"Well, my mind goes back twelve years, no—eleven,

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but before I say more let us have our man in : I think this business has an unexpected angle and I would like to question him before you."

Neil was in the house allotted to him when they arrived by way of the Winnipeg River and Lac des Pluies with the news of Fort Douglas. It had been a strange journey, the more welcome because it left them alone together for almost the first time in years, and it did much for Julie in healing the blow of her father's death. By steady travel they had made the trip in three weeks, and reached Fort William just as Fraser and his companions arrived from Montreal. Then, later, to Neil's great surprise came Angus from the west with the settlers who had had enough of the interior and refused to return to Norway House. He could not desert them, and when he parted from Neil on the bank of the Red River had returned to the fort, hiding outside in the long grass till Cuthbert Grant came his way alone, and between them freedom was arranged for the surviving men of Argyle. He took no credit to himself for this, considering he had only done his duty. Then the exiles had set out to join their kinsmen already transplanted to the distant shores of Lake Ontario.

It had been a cold encounter when again father and son met at Fort William, where Neil's story was already on record, and to that the partners had added what Angus told them on his side : but from neither man had come any hint of relationship. They had remained divided, they had exchanged a hard stare, and Angus again set out with his dejected flotilla for the east. But that was all, and the secret remained their own.

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Now Julie was with child : she, like Angus, had had enough of the *pays d'en haut* ; its memories were too bitter and she aspired for her child something other than she had had herself. Her longing was for life in Canada where Bouché's parents still lived in Trois Rivières. So often had he dwelt on the days they would spend there.

She was reverting to this, and urging Neil to leave the Canadians and secure some post in Montreal, when he was summoned again by the partners. He put his arms round her, kissing her tenderly. Whatever these men might propose, he vowed that they would never be separated again.

"*Chérie*, somehow we will arrange this thing as you desire, but you must be patient, and since there is no priest here we will go to Fond du Lac first. Now I return quickly."

When he entered the great hall Fraser eyed his broad figure sharply and motioned to a seat.

"Mr. Campbell, you have served us well in this affair of Fort Douglas, but now tell me, have we not somewhere met before ?"

"We have," smiled Neil.

"I thought so : when and where was that ?"

"On the morning of the tenth day of May eleven years ago."

"I thought I was not mistaken ; were you not being sent to Mr. Archie Macdonald on Buffalo Lake ?"

"I was, sir."

"And did you not have a crack with Mr. McGillvray about the Campbells and Macdonalds and the Vale of Glencoe ?"

"We had, sir."

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"Did the point ever come up at Buffalo Lake?"

"Ay, sir, it did just as you reckoned, but when I left the fort that winter we parted friendly enough and I never saw him again."

"The winter the fort was destroyed?" asked McLaughlin.

Neil nodded : it was obvious that he did not want to say anything further in that connection, so Fraser took up his questioning again.

"Also, Campbell, you said that your father was in service with the Hudson's Bay, and I pointed out that it would be your future duty to spoil your father's trade."

"Ay, sir, you did say that."

"But according to our information a certain Angus Campbell spoiled your trade that same winter north of the English River."

"That is right," agreed Neil with a faint smile, "we had a difference and he got the fur."

"And this same man," exploded Fraser with a great laugh, "was your father. Also he convoyed those settlers here from the Red River, and is now shepherding them to Lake Ontario."

"He is."

"Then why did you not tell us this before?"

"For the same reason, sir, that he said nothing about it either, and the rest," he added stiffly, "lies between him and me ; it is the affair of none but ourselves."

Fraser nodded approvingly : he had been studying this man, now in the prime of vigour, and here perceived the stuff of which the partners stood in need. His kind was hard to come by.

"He is right, gentlemen, and 'tis not our affair, so

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let us think of the future. I am convinced that this business of Fort Douglas is but the prelude to further trouble : my lord Selkirk will not swallow it if I know him, nor in his place would we. Now, Campbell, I take it you are ready to continue with us ? ”

“ I am not, sir.”

“ Eh, what’s that ? ”

“ I desire to leave the service and settle near Montreal.”

Such straight talk was rare in Fort William, and the partners glanced at each other, frowning, but Neil set his lips the tighter.

“ You are not satisfied ? ” interjected Mackenzie. “ Is it a question of terms ? We can make you a post manager with a percentage of profit, or indeed,”—here he looked at Fraser who sent him a slight nod—“ a partnership might not be so far off.”

“ What’s that you say ? ” asked Neil sharply.

“ After a few more years during which you put your savings into the company, it were reasonable that you became a full partner.”

The young man became interested. “ How many years ? ”

“ Perhaps five or six, and we need your kind in the *pays d’en haut* ; we need someone to control the unruly Cuthbert Grant, and you could do it.”

Neil listened to this with a sense of disillusionment, his bright dream was fading, leaving him cold.

“ I do not return to the interior, sir.”

“ But why when you know it so well ? ”

“ I do, and that’s why ; I’d sooner sleep in peace in Canada, and be done with trickery and fighting ; and had you gentlemen seen yon poor innocent folk lying

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outside Fort Douglas, maybe you'd feel as I do. It's a fearsome thing," he went on with deep feeling, "to hear the prairie dogs choking over those of one's own country. There's a curse goes with the fur, and a bloodstain on every pelt. Also I have with me the woman I desire to marry : she will be a mother this winter, and before that I would be far from here."

Fraser, who had been listening with close attention, said something in a low tone, and McLaughlin turned earnestly to the young man.

"Do not misunderstand us, or decide this matter too hastily. We would like to keep you, Campbell, and there is no hurry ; shortly we start for Montreal, where you and your woman can come with us. Perhaps eleven years in the strong woods is enough at a stretch, so you can winter in the east, we will keep you employed and there you can make up your mind."

"I might do that." Neil's hopes rose again.

"I am glad to hear it. Also you will be worth still more to us when you have learned the other side of our business. As to Fort Douglas, we frankly regret what has happened, and have no personal enmity for Lord Selkirk, but our policies are wide apart. We have opened the west with the help of men like you : we are traders, while he is not, yet he claims the rights we have earned and flourishes a charter that we dispute. It may be that we will come to terms, indeed, I hope so, but till then we do not desire innocent folk to suffer by our divisions. At the present time, however," he added with a smile, "his lordship is in Montreal, so that matter can——"

He was interrupted by a door flung suddenly open, and a voyageur trotted towards him in high excitement.

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"*M'sieu ! M'sieu !* A great brigade comes up the river—one hundred—maybe more than one hundred men—they are the *soldats Suisse* in uniform. They say it is the English with milord Selkirk *lui même*. *Mon Dieu !* It is an army."

They rushed out and stood staring in bewilderment, for down at the lower bend the Kaministiquia's quiet waters were furrowed by speeding yellow prows, a multitude of paddles swung in unison, and Selkirk's company moved impressively towards the fort. In silence it came ; no *chansons à l'aviron* marked the end of that journey, no full-throated shouts of welcome and salutation were exchanged with the fort *engagés* who had hurried to the bank and blinked at this unexpected flotilla. The silence was ominous, and whispering groups cast puzzled glances now at the partners, now at the advancing brigade. Normally the great birchen boats had put on speed as they drew in to finish with superb and powerful dash, but this time a word ran from man to man, the paddles slowed, and when they came abreast the *canots du maître* were barely moving.

The sun struck bright on de Meuron uniforms and pipe-clayed belts, muskets protruded above the springy thwarts, and here was an armament prepared for war.

"By God !" said Fraser in a startled tone, "it is Selkirk, but how does he arrive here now ?"

McLaughlin did not answer, he felt too dazed ; the British Earl was sitting erect in the leading canoe, sending them not a single glance, his face stern with the ultimate decision to stake all on one last throw. Beside him was Angus, whose evidence he needed in what would shortly take place, and Angus's hard eyes roved along the bank till they rested on Neil and Julie,

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when the look he exchanged with the young man was cold as ice. The girl clung to Neil's arm, and fear troubled her breast.

At a sign the brigade turned in to the opposite shore where Selkirk got out and stood talking to his chief lieutenant, and at sight of this man Mackenzie gave an oath.

"But that's Campbell, Angus Campbell, who came through here convoying the settlers."

"So father and son meet once more," nodded Fraser, "and I will be interested to watch it, but," he added gravely, "until to-day no uniformed men have set foot in the *pays d'en haut*. The presence of these is a portent."

The unnatural silence grew every minute more threatening. With the de Meurons were some *man-geurs de lard* from Montreal who had disembarked and ranged themselves loosely; they were all armed and fumbling with their weapons; they looked stupid, puzzled, with no real desire to fight, and stood making awkward childish gestures across the river to men they knew, men with whom they had voyaged from Lachine in other days. There was something queer about all this, queer and confusing, but did shooting begin they were ready.

Distant about a hundred yards of shining water stood the *engagés* of the fort with clerks and accountants, some carrying muskets, others with hands empty, all waiting uncertainly. Farther upstream a group of Saulteaux had squatted on the bank consumed with curiosity, foreseeing trouble between the whites, but themselves determined to keep out of it, impassive and voiceless, ready to disappear at the first shot. Later when it was

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all over they would come back and trade fur just as before, which was all that any white man really wanted. It had always been like that.

Now Selkirk came across with Angus and the de Meurons : they disembarked, and for the first time the young Earl set foot in the stronghold of his rivals. At a word the soldiers fell into line, primed muskets at the slope, while Selkirk looked hard at the senior partner and made a formal salute. Not since one night eleven years previously when he drank wine at the Beaver Club had he and these princes of the fur trade been together.

"Mr. Fraser, I believe?"

"Yes. This is Mr. Kenneth Mackenzie and Mr. McLaughlin. I would ask why the honour of your presence here?"

Selkirk took a folded parchment from his breast pocket and held it out.

"My appointment as Justice of the Peace : do you care to verify it?"

"I do not, my lord, nor do I question it. My congratulations."

"They are somewhat premature," said Selkirk frigidly. "Gentlemen, I am here on grave business ; I have learned that your Bois Brulés, acting under your orders, have sacked Fort Douglas, dispersed my settlers, killed two of my officers and twenty men. Do you deny it?"

Fraser for once in his life was nonplussed ; the preposterous, incredible thing had happened ; McLaughlin stood fuming, equally at sea, and Mackenzie looked reckless.

"We admit nothing," he said.

"Then I will save you the trouble. Campbell?"

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"Ay, sir."

"You saw the affair?"

"I did, sir."

"When?"

"On the nineteenth day of June, this day two months past."

"The attack was unprovoked?"

"Ay, in a manner of speaking," said Angus with a dour glance at his son. "The Metis were trespassing, and the Governor went out to warn them off."

"Is there here any man that was in their party?"

Angus stretched a brown hand towards his son. "That one, but," he added gruffly, "he took no part in the killing."

"Is this true?" Selkirk wheeled sharply on Neil.

"Ay—part of it."

"What part?"

"I was with Cuthbert Grant coming down the Assiniboine. Not wishing to pass under the fort, we left the river five miles up, and not taking the travelled road, we crossed the prairie two miles to the north, making for the Frog Plain with carts of pemmican. Grant had no desire for conflict, and so he told me afterwards. The fort was behind us when Mr. Semple came out with an armed force and made after us, so we stopped and turned. There was talk of trespass by the Governor, the first shot fired by one of your men, and then it began. That is the truth—all of it."

"You took part in the looting?"

"I did not, but got away before it started. There was a reason."

"What reason? Your story does not hold together—I do not believe it."

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Neil's eyes turned to Angus, and he felt Julie's fingers gripping his arm like steel claws, but she would not speak unless he wished it, and the face of Angus was like stone.

"Mr. Fraser," announced Selkirk in a high-pitched nervous voice, "I arrest you gentlemen with this other person on the charge of inciting to murder; also you will now surrender this fort with all it contains." Then with a sharp gesture to the de Meurons. "To your arms and cover these men!"

There was a rattle, a click of long-eared hammers, the four-foot barrels jerked up and stayed level while blue Swiss eyes squinted over the sights, and Fraser with his friends stood motionless, wondering if it were not all a dream. A hush spread from bank to bank, the *mangeurs de lard* began to finger their triggers, for seemingly they might have to fight, and the gaping *Saulteaux* gathered themselves for flight.

Now it was forced on Fraser that here lay no ill-planned action such as they had learned to expect from the English. Selkirk might be mad, but his type of madness had an edge to it, and Fort William with what it held represented not less than eighty thousand pounds value; apart from the fur it contained records of years, lacking which the partners must suffer grievously. But when this crazy performance was referred as ultimately it must be, to Montreal for adjudication, the Canadians could rely on their influence. In the meantime the law had made a dramatic landing in the *pays d'en haut*, and there was left no alternative.

So Fraser only nodded.

"I arrest you, gentlemen, and this man," repeated Selkirk in his high broken voice. "Campbell, you

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know this place, so conduct these three to their own quarters, posting a sentry day and night. At any attempt at flight they will be fired on. Confine this young man in the guard-room. Mr. Fraser, you will instruct your accountant to put all books of the company at my disposal with your inventories of fur, and later I will inform you of my further decision. Is there anything you desire to say?"

Fraser looked the young Earl straight in the face and shrugged.

"My lord, for the moment the cards are with you, but just for the moment—that is all."

A declining sun was gilding the smooth ribbon of the river when the partners sat in grave contemplation of the events of the day, with a Swiss sentry pacing stiffly outside. The *mangeurs de lard* had crossed the stream, their camp-fires dotted the northerly bank, and between them and the employees of Fort William rose a babble of excited talk. Selkirk as a precaution had closed the *cantine salope*, so there would be no drinking that night, and he himself, alone in the long hall, the scene of so much feasting and shrewd conference, was considering the next move. He had entered the den of lions and subdued its inmates. Now what should he do with them?

The fate of Fort Douglas had outraged his nature. When setting out from Montreal his intention had not been militant; he desired only to protect his settlers, to establish once and for all the rights that he truly believed he possessed, and make such a show of force that the Canadians would harass him no longer; and he had not dreamed that in acquiring control of the

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ancient company he had made himself heritor of so merciless a contest.

To-day he had gone as far as he dared ; for the moment he was master of the magazine of his rivals, the spout through which passed all the wealth they drew from the *pays d'en haut* and all the goods that flowed back into it. 'Twas the jugular vein of the Norwesters, but he could not hope to hold it long.

A pile of ledgers had been placed before him, and turning the stiff parchment leaves of the one most recent he saw an entry.

"Athabasca Dist. 160 packs !" On the margin a cynical note. "H.B. 5 packs." There was no comment, the figures leered at him. £16,000 for the Canadians—£500 for himself !

A wave of apathy burdened his spirit, and his eyes turned to Thompson's great map, pride of the Norwesters, for there lay the story from the Great Bay to the Columbia. Fraser—Stuart—the four Mackenzies—McTavish—Hendry—Macdonald of Garth—such names came to him, they had left their record on that map, and what men of his own could he match against them ? At this he began to feel lonely and disillusioned, and went out on the balcony fronting the long hall, perceiving that he wanted some confidant in this difficult hour, but here was none. Presently, while he was pacing the square of the fort, shoulders bowed under the burden of success, he came upon Angus, and the sight of that dour silent Scot conveyed a sort of comfort.

"Well, Campbell, is all quiet ?"

"Ay, sir ; not a squeak out of any of them."

"I have decided about the prisoners. This entire

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matter must now come before the Courts, so they will go to Montreal for trial."

"When, sir?" The grey eyes opened a shade wider.

"While the weather holds good it is best to act quickly."

"You'll be sending all four?"

"I am, and your evidence will be necessary to convict them, so it is best that you conduct the party to see that they have proper treatment on the way. The gentlemen will take their personal servants. On arrival at Montreal you will report to the chief magistrate, deliver over your charge and take orders from him. Also you will have a document from me. Is that understood?"

"But do you not come, sir?"

"I follow soon afterwards, but first take the de Meurons to Red River and re-establish Fort Douglas. The end of this business is not yet."

"About yon man in the guard-house?" asked Angus dubiously.

"Well, what of him?"

"What he said, sir, was right; he had no hand in the killing, I saw it all and will answer for that."

"Hand or no hand," snapped Selkirk, "he was with Grant, and I think he lied to me. So you will tell them my decision—tell them all."

He passed on, leaving Angus staring after him, gnawing a bearded lip. Montreal—with Neil as a prisoner! So that was to be the end of it. Something buried long and deep stirred in his breast, and he gave a strange smile that was a little sad, for neither he nor Neil had lied—about anything; they could fight, but not lie,

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and at that he felt a queer warmth of satisfaction. Was the whole world gone mad over the damned fur? He had a vision of years ago, and Neil's small face, and how it shone when someone came down the glen with a red deer over his shoulder.

Shaking a puzzled head he went first to the guard-house—the gentlemen could afford to wait—and found Julie sitting outside; she had been there for hours, and he halted, frowning down at her, while she gave him a look, pleading yet defiant.

"M'sieu, may I not see him?"

"Ay, later, but I would speak to him first."

"What is to be done?"

"I will tell him that."

"But—but he did nothing! Why is he in there?"

"For keeping bad company, so he goes to Montreal."

"Oh!" She put her hand to her heart. "Montreal! I have long desired to go there."

"But he leaves as a prisoner and without you."

At this her heart seemed to stop, and she was dazed. "For—for doing nothing?"

"That is what the Court will decide," said Angus coldly.

"M'sieu," she faltered, "why do you hate him so? Why are you so hard? Will you also hate his son when he is born?"

Angus stiffened. "Eh, what's that?"

"This winter: I think it will be a son, and nearly all white, but you will never see him."

Angus made a queer sound in his throat, stared down at the slack figure and went on into the guard-house. Neil, sitting on a bench beneath a small heavily barred window, lifted his flaxen head, and his eyes had a glint

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that might have been humour when he saw his visitor. For a moment neither spoke.

"I have just seen his lordship," said Angus formally.

"There is news for you."

"I could do with news, it is quiet in here."

"Then you and the gentlemen go to Montreal for trial," here Angus cleared his throat "in my charge."

Neil, nodding, stroked a square, bristling chin.

"So that's it."

"Ay, that's it."

"And when?"

"Likely the morn's morn."

"And Julie?"

"His Lordship said no word of her, so she'll stay here."

"She was set on Montreal," said the young man gravely, "and I would we might be married first, for my child stirs in her breast, but there's no priest in the fort."

"Ay, she told me," Angus hesitated a little, "also that she was set on Montreal, but I have no say in the matter. His lordship deems you a liar, and when I said it was not so he did not believe me either."

"Selkirk's a Southron," answered Neil with a shrug, "and does not understand folk like us."

At this came a sort of interlude when they avoided each other's glance, but their stark spirits seemed to move a little closer: Neil sat twisting his strong fingers till the joints cracked, and Angus pinched the fringe of his beard. Again the young man noted how grey it was becoming, how deep were the channelled lines in the granite features—like little water-courses in a dry season, he thought.

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"It will be a long time now since you left Argyle," he said vaguely.

"A long, long time : it is a far cry from here."

"My mother—you never knew?"

Slowly Angus shook his big head. "No, nor of the pain in her breast ; she never wrote of that."

"But you never wrote back."

"Ay—I was wrong there, lad." It came out with a burst, a sort of explosion that tore through long-crustured surfaces, the most human thing he had said for years ; then he looked ashamed : "Y'see, I was busy, always busy travelling here and there, so I lost the habit. And that matter of Bouché—I speak of that now. He killed the Governor, so there was nothing else for me to do, but she—" here he lowered his voice, pointing to the door—"that's past her to understand, so tell her, lad, when the time comes, tell her in your own way. And there's one thing more. I mind well what happened on the Red River between you and me, but there'll be none of that here, so you needn't expect that I'll do what Cuthbert Grant winked his eye at at Fort Douglas."

"Who's asking for escape?" flashed Neil hotly.

"Was there ever a Norwester that feared the Hudson's Bay?"

Angus gave him a wintry smile. "I canna say as to that, but there's some that'll be doing hard thinking before long," here he paused, then, his expression changing, "as to yon girl of yours and our little business in the interior ; when I met her on yon river—'twas the Mudjatick—I did not tell her all I should, but I left you with food enough and in no danger."

"That is as it may be, go on."

The Reckoning

"Did it happen you saw anything of that big Cree of mine called Keego with a scar on his cheek? I missed him soon after—he went off, leaving no word."

"Nor were there any words to be said: he lay with a bullet through his brain."

"God's mercy! How's that?"

"My woman's bullet. Shall she tell you?"

Angus was shaken at this. He opened the door and beckoned; with a sharp cry Julie ran to Neil, flinging her arms round him, while Angus watched these two, eyes narrowing, his throat a little dry.

"Julie," said Neil, "you and I will talk afterwards, but first of that time north of the Mudjatick River after you had met my—my father. You camped before you found us, but what happened that night? Tell him all, and about us."

She gave it slowly, carefully, counting her words and searching these two faces, while Angus sat motionless, pulling down his thick brows.

"And your hunters did not return?" he creaked presently.

"No," said Neil, "I met one of them later at Ile à la Crosse and he told me why, but that was none of your doing. Now if there is nothing else you would say I desire to talk to Julie."

Angus went out, closing the door softly; he stood quite still for a moment of uncertainty, then moved towards the house that Selkirk now occupied wagging his big head in a sort of confusion. At the door he hesitated, and knocked.

"What is it now?" Selkirk had pulled off his long boots and was stretched at ease.

"There is another matter, sir, a matter that—"

The Fur Masters

Angus fumbled his speech—"that I must speak of; it concerns yon man in the guard-house."

"We have disposed of it."

"In a manner of speaking it's disposed of, but I hope not. He's my son."

"What!" Selkirk sat up straight. "Your son!"

"Ay, my only son, Neil."

"But why did you not tell me this before?" demanded Selkirk blinking.

"Well, sir, the right moment didna just come. Now it's here."

"Go on, Campbell."

"It's a long story, sir."

"Perhaps I need a story to-night. Let us have it."

Angus took a deep breath and began to talk in a jerky fashion as though it hurt; his rugged countenance softened a little as the tale went on, while the young Earl, forgetful for a moment of the burden he had that day assumed, became absorbed in this grim story of elashing loyalties.

"You understand," continued the low, gruff voice, "that it couldna be otherwise; we pledged our faith each of us, and signed a book, and the fur lay between us. Yon time I speak of north of the English River I got the fur, it being ours by right, and the man Bouché, the girl's father, tried to shoot me, but wasna quick enough. Two months ago on the Red River I shot him as I told you the day we met in Goulais Bay. You'll mind that?"

"I remember. Go on."

"He was father to the girl my son aims to marry."

"The one who came here with him from Fort Douglas?"

The Reckoning

"Ay, Julie Bouché."

"That's hard, Campbell, and you but did your duty."

"I did, but 'tis too much to ask any woman to see that, and this winter she bears him a child. I am thinking it will be a man-child, sir, a Scots quarter-breed, sir, and there's none better."

"So that's it, eh?"

"It's like that; and Neil, sir, is not feared of you or any man, but doesna like being put down a liar. Now you've got the reason he cleared away from Fort Douglas so quick; 'twas because he saved my life from the Metis, but did he put that forward you might think he asks mercy from you. He asks none from any man, sir, and that's the truth, for his hands are clean of blood."

"But why did you not tell me all this before?" asked Selkirk more and more astonished.

"It wasna entirely my business: Neil wouldna have it, and what has passed between him and me is our affair. For the rest of it, sir, the blame lies with the fur."

"Fur!"

"Ay, sir, just fur; there's a wall of it dividing us, and over that we come to grips. 'Tis that that brings us amongst the savages, and keeps us there till the rest of the world is wiped out and we see nothing but the cursed pelts themselves."

"There's small room now," he went on with intense earnestness, "for decency, forby anything else, between those on opposite sides of that wall—unless—unless——"

"Unless what, Campbell? I'm thinking you know better than I do."

The Fur Masters

"Well, sir, that's the story, there's one question I'd like to put."

"What is it?"

"Over in Argyle a Justice of the Peace can join two persons in legal matrimony. Does that hold here?"

Selkirk sent him a very human smile. "I believe it is within my authority if the two persons——"

With a swiftness remarkable in one so big, Angus had gone like the wind, and the young Earl waited, feeling a little thankful for this unexpected interlude. No trader was he, no merchant prince or thrusting adventurer, but a man just approaching his prime, animated with an ambition that had already cost him dear. Not till now had he quite realized what the fight for the fur had cost others; earnestly he desired to end this interminable struggle, and equally felt assured that any mere compromise or truce would spell the ruin of his dream. Were there on his side more men like his prisoners, his heart had been lighter.

He was thinking moodily in this strain when Angus reappeared, head up.

"They're here, sir, at your service, and I have said nothing."

Selkirk regarded the two with interest: Julie's dark eyes were bright with anxiety and she clutched Neil's hand; the young man's jaw was set, clearly he expected grave news, but no fear showed in him and he stood like a young pine tree whose roots had gripped the solid rock. The master of the Hudson's Bay had a throb of admiration and envy, for here was the stuff of which a young nation was best built.

"You are Neil Campbell?"

"Ay, that's my name."

The Reckoning

"And this is Julie Bouché?"

"*Oui, m'sieu, c'est moi* but——"

"Well, Campbell, I am now better informed about yourself, and release you from confinement," said Selkirk quietly. "You will go to Montreal but as a free man, and there make your statement concerning Fort Douglas. I shall not proceed against you."

At this Neil choked a little; he met the frank gaze and turned to Julie.

"*Chérie*, you hear that?"

"Is it true," she whispered, "is it true?"

"Quite true," nodded Selkirk smiling.

"M'sieu, m'sieu, how can I thank you enough?"

"I ask no thanks. Campbell," he went on with a sudden warm friendly look, "you and this woman desire to be married?"

"But, m'sieu, how do you know that?" cried Julie.

"Yes, for so long a time have we wanted this, but there was no priest. Eh, Neil, is that not so? Is there a priest here?"

"No, but a Justice of the Peace: now put your hand in his—so! Campbell, have you a ring?"

Neil turned a dull red, licked his lips and made a vague gesture. This must be a dream. He glanced into Angus's eyes, found there something that made him feel strangely young, then shook his big head in confusion, a great, helpless, childish giant.

"I never had a ring, sir," he stammered.

"Then use this"—Selkirk took from his finger a signet that carried the arms of Daer cut in a blood-red stone—"no—on the other finger, yes—that. With this man, Angus Campbell, for witness I pronounce you man and wife. I wish you well, and will see you both," he

The Fur Masters

lingered a little on the word both, "in Montreal. You may go."

Again he was alone and sat musing, curiously helped and softened by this occasion, till inevitably his thoughts turned to the three partners. Now in a more relaxed and natural mood it seemed that there was something he had left undone, so pulling on his long boots he went over to the house where the Canadians were under guard, waved aside a saluting sentry, and knocked.

"Who is there?"

"The Earl of Selkirk—may he come in?"

The three rose as he entered; he bowed and the salutation was distantly returned.

"Gentlemen," he said with formality, "your pardon for this intrusion: I trust that your wants are being attended to."

"Our wants," replied Mr. Fraser frigidly, "will not be attended to this side of Montreal, but we are in a position to wait."

"I am glad to hear it. Has any message reached you from me?"

"No message."

"Then I deliver it myself, and inform you that you will be conveyed to Montreal without delay, travelling shall we say under a certain supervision, but not without your customary comforts. It is imperative that our differences and my charges be finally disposed of by the highest authority in the land."

"We have no fear as to the result, my lord."

"Nor have I, so it seems we are both content; I welcome that, and regret any inconvenience you may have suffered, but circumstances left no alternative."

The Reckoning

Your personal servants will accompany you, and are at your disposal here."

Mr. Fraser bowed again.

"Also might I have your parole that till then no attempt is made at escape, or my sentry will be under the unfortunate necessity of firing; your word is quite sufficient."

"You have it," exploded Mackenzie, "and I speak for my friends; we are as anxious to reach Montreal as yourself."

"In that case," rejoined Selkirk with a gesture of engaging sincerity, "will you gentlemen pay me the honour of dining with me to-night? I cannot hope to offer you the amenities of the Beaver Club, but will do my best."

On a day in May six years later, four persons sat on the bank of the St. Lawrence, an elderly grey-bearded man, a younger one very like him but clean-shaven, a brown-faced woman in her prime, and a boy five years old. They were watching the brigade preparing to depart for the north, but were equally interested in a tartan piper who strutted near by carrying an instrument the wail of which is said to arouse the true Scot to such homicidal fury that he has no fear of death.

"Neil," said the woman, "what is that thing he wears instead of clothes?"

"It is called a kilt."

"Will he wear it in the *pays d'en haut*?"

"No doubt."

"But *les mouches*—the mosquitoes—I am sorry for him."

The Fur Masters

"No doubt of that either," smiled Neil, "but 'tis the Governor's orders."

"*C'est drole*, eh? How far do you go this time?" she added wistfully.

"To the western mountains."

"Then you pass by Buffalo Lake?"

He nodded: they were alone for a moment, the older man had taken the boy to inspect the piper whom he found to be from the Grampians with a home in Glen Garry, so at once they were deep in the Gaelic.

"It is all so strange," murmured Julie, her eyes on her son.

Neil took her small hand in his big one. "Ay, new and strange; Julie, you are now content?"

"But yes; sometimes of course, one remembers, for there is so much to remember. And you, *mon homme*?"

"All's well with me," he said quietly, "what do you remember most?"

"What I would most like to forget."

"That will pass. Tell me, you are happy with my father?"

"Yes, quite happy now: he looks at me sometimes with sad eyes as though he too were remembering, then smiles if I look at him. And sometimes I think it cannot all be true—all that has happened."

They glanced at each other with understanding and she felt the strong pressure of his hand. Six winters had come and gone since the Bois Brulés of Guthbert Grant laid waste Fort Douglas, and now that stretch of the Red River wore a different aspect; enlarging fields lay green, men ploughed the dark soil in peace, and the days of danger were done. Down the Red River came singing brigades heavy with pelts from the

The Reckoning

Mackenzie and Athabasca, while no ambush harassed their passage, no rifles spat from clustered thickets. The Lords of the Lakes and Forests had buried the hatchet, smoked the calumet with the men from the Bay, and the fight for fur was over. Alexander Mackenzie had made his last journey to the *pays d'en haut*; in the same year Selkirk, his life worn out in conflict, was laid in a foreign grave, and now the fur trade of half a continent rested in the strong hands of a new-comer, George Simpson.

Both factions were in truth tired out: they had hounded each other into court, there were arrests, fines, bail and warning, while the *pays d'en haut* was safe for none: the English drew on their resources, the Scots of Montreal squandered their gains to little purpose, till at last the British Cabinet, weary of the mess, and thinking that perhaps Selkirk had not been so far wrong when he sent ploughs to the prairie, hinted that it was time the orgy ceased and the interior be made habitable for peace-loving folk.

So it came that the ancient company, retaining its chartered rights, was infused with a stream of warm new blood; it emerged from the chamber of conciliation more Scots than English, its veins began to pulse with novel vigour, and young Simpson set himself to rebuild from the ruins of the past.

It was under this leadership that Neil and his father, each holding loyalty to the end, came at last together. The wall of fur was down. Angus drew the savings of thirty years, then retired and settled in Montreal, while Neil, still in service and standing well with the new Governor, was now headed for Fort Vermillion on the Peace River, where the ensign of the English com-

The Fur Masters

pany flew from its high stockade. The days of his journeying were not yet over, his heart was in the trade now so bloodless. He was happy, he had a son. And in his absence Julie lived with Angus.

Julie smiled at the small boy who had moved on and stood gazing at the great canoes : they could see Angus explaining this and that ; the middlemen knelt, playing with their paddles, buttocks braced against the springy thwarts ; the bowmen had already taken position, small flags fluttered at the high curving yellow bows, and again the *mangeurs de lard* visioned the well-known reaches of the Ottawa, the rapids of Ste. Marie, the granite cliffs and formidable expanse of Lake Superior. The wilderness had called and they were ready : but Julie thought only of her small son.

"He will go into the trade, Neil?"

"Why not? 'Twill be another thing now, and different from what we saw, also I hear that the Governor will soon have naught to do with liquor for the savages. It minds me of what Daniel Harmon said one time seventeen years ago : he saw what it would come to."

"*Grâce à Dieu* for that ! Neil, I'm thinking of Buffalo Lake and the bourgeois—that was drink."

"Nothing else, *Chérie*, to-day I heard that Fort William may soon be abandoned."

"But why?"

"We will bring all goods from England to York Factory, thence to Norway House, and the fur will go out that way too. Tell me, does my father ever speak of yours?"

"No, not ever, but his eyes show that he does not forget. I said that next week Louis and I go to visit

The Reckoning

my aunt at Trois Rivières, but he said nothing and turned away."

"And you—from your heart can you say that he is forgiven? It will be perhaps six months before we meet again, and it would be good to hear that before I go."

"Not yet, *mon ame*," said she, gazing at him with affection, "it is still too soon for that, but it will surely come. So often in the night I hear again those last words 'tell him that he shoots well,' but it will be so by the time you return. Presently you will pass Fort Douglas?"

"Ay, and it's a decent place now: that morn we left him on the river-bank, you mind that?"

She nodded.

"I knew very well he would not desert the settlers, and he saw that I knew."

"But how, Neil, how?"

"'Twas like that always between us, but it can't be put into words."

"Our little Louis—he must never know."

"God forbid; it would not be fair, he could not understand."

"*Alors*," she smiled, "for six months I shall be daughter to my *beau-père*—and *voici le Gouverneur*."

A two-horse *calèche* came trotting rapidly along the Montreal road, and a young-looking man, jumping down, cast a keen glance at the waiting canoes and expectant middlemen. He had a roundish head, a tilted nose, flexible lips and small strong chin; his manner was vivacious, his expression highly intelligent and he wore an air of natural authority. At sight of Neil he gave a nod.

The Fur Masters

"All is ready, Campbell?"

Neil, already aware that Simpson laid stress on the formalities, gave a salute. "All ready, sir."

"You have picked my men for fast travel?"

"Ay, sir, the best we have."

"Good! I propose to push ahead and not wait on the brigade. You will travel with me. Macdonald!" he added sharply.

The piper wheeled.

"Take your place behind me."

The man from Glen Garry stepped cautiously into the leading canoe where he balanced himself on a bale of strouds, filled his lungs and fingered his chanter.

After a final glance round, the young Governor followed him; the chatter along the crowded banks fell to nothing, Mr. Simpson lifted his wide-brimmed beaver hat to the gentlemen who had come to speed him off, and gave one sharp word of command.

Instantly the yellow paddles swung and dipped, ripples spread from a dozen curving bows, the man from Glen Garry came into his own. The great canoes began to recede, and clear across the shining water drifted back the strains of Highland Laddie.

Julie had moved beside Angus; she slipped an arm into his, felt a strong friendly pressure, and took her son's small warm hand in her own. Angus's face was wistful; he did not look at her or the boy but stared fixedly at the dwindling flotilla with its rhythm of flashing blades. His eyes were cloudy with memory.

"Man's work," he said under his breath, "man's work."

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